MODERN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

THE ANNOTATED CRITICAL LAOZI

With Contemporary Explication and Traditional Commentary

CHEN GUYING

Edited by
PAUL J. D'AMBROSIO AND XIAO OUYANG

BRILL

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Terms

ai 哀 [sympathize, be compassionate]
an 安 [settled, unworried]
ben xing 本性 [original nature, original inclinations, natural constitution]
ci 慈 [loving-kindness, compassion, parental care]
chong 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash]
dao 道 [Dao, way, method, path]
da dao 大道 [the great Dao]
de 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]
fan 反 [opposite, reversal]
fan 返 [returning, reversal]
fei 废 [abandon, waste]
gui 贵 [precious, rare]
guilü 规律 [regularity, rules, pattern]
jing 静 [tranquil, still, calm]
jingjie 境界 [realm, horizon]
li 理 [pattern, principle, coherence]
liu qin 六亲 [three family relations and six roles]
min 闵 [sympathy, compassion]
ming 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing]
pu 朴 [simple, plain, unadorned, uncarved wood]
qi 其 [it/its, he/his, she/her, they/them]
qi 气 [energy, vital energy, material]
ren 任 [indulge in, let oneself go by]
ruo 弱 [weak, decline]
ruo 若 [like, as, if, and, but]
se 啬 [frugality, parsimonious]
shen 身 [body, self, person]
sheng 生 [generate, live, exist, grow]
shengren 圣人 [the sage]
tian 天 [Heaven, heaven, sky]
Tian Dao 天道 [the Dao of Heaven]
Tiangan 天干 (*The Ten Celestial Stems*)
tianxia 天下 [everything under heaven, all under heaven, the world]
wan wu 万物 [all things, everything]
wang 王 [king, supreme, to rule]
wei 微 [minute, subtle]

wu 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]
wu-wei 无为 [non-action, non-assertive action]
wu-zhi 无知 [no understanding, a type of ignorance]
xiaoxi 消息 [the rise and fall of things, (usually refers to the five agents)]
xin 心 [heart-mind, heart]
xing 兴 [rise up, excite]
yin yang 阴阳 yin yang
yingxu 盈虚 [the surplus and deficit (usually, of *yinyang* or Heaven and earth)]
you 有 [presence, having, being]
yu 愚 [unsophisticated, ignorant, stupidity]
yuan 远 [distance from, estrange]
yuan qi 元气 [original *qi*]
xuan 玄 [dark, deep, profound, shimmering darkness]
zheng 争 [contend, struggle]
zhong 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave, to attach importance to]
zhu 主 [foundation, principal]
ze 则 [norm, example, standard, model]
ziran 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]

Texts (Classic and early versions of the *Laozi*)

Baopuzi 抱朴子 [*Writings of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity*]
Bisheng 笔乘 [*The Brush-Chariot*]
Bian ming lun 辨命论 [*Essay on Predestination*]
Boshu 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*]
Boshu jia 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)]
Boshu Laozi jiaozhu 帛书老子校注 [*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi*]
Boshu Laozi zhuyi yu yanjiu 帛书老子注译与研究 [*Research on Interpretations and Annotations of Laozi Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*]
Boshu yi 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)]
Cangjiepian 仓颉篇 [*Book of Cangjie*]
Chuci 楚辞 [*Songs of Chu*]
Chunqiu zhuan 春秋传 [*Records of Spring and Autumn*]
Chun qiu zuo zhuan 春秋左传 [*The Commentary of Zuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals*]
Cijie 次解 [*Daode zhenjing ci jie* 道德真经次解 (*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*)]
Da dai li ji 大戴礼记 [*Book of Rites Compiled by Dai the Elder*]
Dao zang 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*]
Daode baozhang 道德宝章 [*The Precious Chapters of Dao and De*]
Daode pianzhang xuansong 道德篇章玄颂 [*The Mysterious Chanting for the Chapters of the Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing cangshi zuan wei pian 道德真经藏室纂微篇 [*Compiling the Subtlety of a Private Collection of the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing chuan 道德真经传 [*On the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing ci jie 道德真经次解 [*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing jie 道德真经解 [*Explanations of the Genuine Daodejing*]
Zhao Bingwen 赵秉文 (d. 1232) *Daode zhenjing jijie* 道德真经集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing lun 道德真经论 [*On the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing qu shan ji 道德真经取善集 [*Collection of the Quality Commentaries on the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing yijie 道德真经义解 [*Interpretation of the Genuine Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing zhangju xunsong 道德真经章句训颂 [*Instructive Chanting for the Chapters of the Daodejing*]
Daode zhenjing zhu 道德真经注 [*Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*]
Dade zhigui lun 道德指归论 [*On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De*]

Daode zhigui lunzhu 道德指归论注 [*Annotation of the On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De*]
Daodejing bei 道德经碑 [*Stone Tablet Inscription of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing ce 道德经测 [*Observations on the Daodejing*]
Daodejing guben pian 道德经古本篇 [*The Ancient Text of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing jie 道德经解 [*Explication of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing jijie 道德经集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing jizhu 道德经集注 [*Collected Annotations to the Laozi*]
Daodejing jingjie 道德经精解 [*Meticulous Interpretation of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing lunbing yaoyi shu 道德经论兵要义述 [*Outline of Discussions of Military Affairs in the Daodejing*]
Daodejing kaiti xujue yishu 道德经开题序诀义疏 [*A Hermeneutic Study of the Subject Revealing and the Knack Ordering of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing pingdian 道德经评点 [*Punctuated and Annotated Edition of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing shici 道德经释辞 [*Explanation of Terms in the Daodejing*]
Daodejing shilüe 道德经释略 [*Brief Commentary on the Daodejing*]
Daodejing shuyi jiejie 道德经疏义节解 [*Sectional Explanation of a Hermeneutic Study of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing zhu 道德经注 [*Annotations to the Daodejing*]
Daodejing zhushu 道德经注疏 [*Commentary and Annotation of the Daodejing*]
Daodejing zhuanyu 道德经转语 [*The Converted Language of the Daodejing*]
Daojia lunbian Mouzi lihuo lun 道家论辩牟子理惑论 [*Refutations of Daoism, Mouzi's Treatise on Settling Doubts*]
Daojia wenhua yanjiu 道家文化研究 [*Research in Daoist Culture*]
Daxue 大学 [*The Great Learning*]
Dazangjing Mouzi lihuo lun 大藏经牟子理惑论 [*Taishō Tripiṭaka, Mouzi's Treatise on Settling Doubts*]
Dingguan jing 定观经 [*Book of Concentration and Contemplation*]
Dunhuang ben 敦煌本 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*]
Dunhuang Xin 敦煌辛 [*Dunhuang Xin Manuscript*]
Dushu zazhi 读书杂志 [*Miscellaneous Reading Notes*]
Er Ya 尔雅 [*Approaching Correctness*]
Guanzi 管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*]
Guang ya 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*]
Guangchengzi 广成子 [*Writings of Master Guangcheng*]
Guodian jian 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*]
Guodian chu jian 郭店楚简 [*Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips*]
Guodian chujian Laozi jiaodu 郭店楚简老子校读 [*Collation and Reading of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]

Guodian zhujian laozi shixi yu yanjiu 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*An Analysis and Investigation into the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]
Guoyu 国语 [*Discourses of the States*]
Han shu 汉书 [*Book of the Han*]
Hanfeizi 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*]
Han shi wai zhuan 韩诗外传 [*The Outer Commentary to the Book of Songs by Master Han*]
Heshang Gong zhu 河上公注 [*Heshang Gong Commentary*]
Huainanzi 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*]
Huangdi Sijing 黄帝四经 [*The Yellow Emperor's Four Classics*]
Jiao Laozi 校老子 [*Examining the Laozi*]
Jia sheng liezhuan 贾生列传 [*Biography of Jia Yi*] in the *Shiji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*]
[*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 [*Textual Explanations of the Classics*]
Jinji zonglun 晋纪总论 [*General Treatise on the Annals of the Jin Dynasty*]
Jingmen Guodian zhujian Laozi jiegu 荆门郭店竹简老子解诂 [*Explanatory Notes to the Bamboo Slips of the Laozi Unearthed in Guodian near the city Jingmen*]
Jing Long stele version
Jinyu 晋语 [*Discourses of Jin*]
Laode zhenjing song 老德真经颂 [*Chanting for the Genuine Canon from the Old Virtuous*]
Laozi benyi 老子本义 [*The Original Meaning of the Laozi*]
Laozi boshu jiaozhu 老子帛书校注 [*Commentary and Annotations to the Mawangdui Laozi*]
Laozi da jie 老子达解 [*Comprehensive Interpretation of the Laozi*]
Laozi daodejing canbu 老子道德经参补 [*Supplements to the Daodejing of Laozi*]
Laozi daodejing guben jijie 老子道德经古本集解 [*Collection and Commentary on Ancient Editions of Laozi's Daodejing*]
Laozi daodejing guben jizhu 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text*]
Laozi daodejing huijie 老子道德经薈解 [*Collection of Commentaries on the Daodejing of Laozi*]
Laozi daodejing jingjie 老子道德经精解 [*Expounding the Daodejing of Laozi*]
Laozi daodejing kao yi 老子道德经考异 [*A Comparative Investigation of the Various Versions of Laozi's Daodejing and its Commentaries*]
Laozi daodejing leizuan 老子道德经类纂 [*Concordance to the Daodejing of Laozi*]
Laozi daodejing pingdian 老子道德经评点 [*Comments on the Daodejing of Laozi*]
Laozi daodejing xuanlan 老子道德经玄览 [*Profound Observations on the Daodejing of Laozi*]
Laozi duanzhu 老子断注 [*Annotated Evaluation of the Laozi*]

Laozi guben kao 老子古本考 [*An Investigation into the Ancient Editions of the Laozi*]
Laozi huo wen 老子或问 [*Questions on the Laozi*]
Laozi jiaobu 老子斠补 [*Collations and Emendations to the Laozi*]
Laozi jiaogu 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]
Laozi jiaodu 老子校读 [*Collated Laozi*]
Laozi jie 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*]
Laozi jiaoshi 老子校释 [*Explanations of the Laozi*]
Laozi jiejie 老子节解 [*A Sectional Explanation of the Laozi*]
Laozi jijie 老子集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Laozi*]
Laozi lang huan 老子娜嬛 [*Grand Library of the Laozi*]
Laozi lüejie 老子略解 [*A Brief Explanation of the Laozi*]
Laozi lun 老子论 [*On the Laozi*]
Laozi pinjie 老子品节 [*Evaluation of the Laozi*]
Laozi yishang 老子奇赏 [*An Innovative Appreciation of the Laozi*]
Laozi tangben yikao 老子唐本异考 [*Investigation into the Differences in Tang-Dynasty Editions of the Laozi*]
Laozi tong 老子通 [*Comprehensive Commentary on the Laozi*]
Laozi tongyi 老子通义 [*General Meaning of the Laozi*]
Laozi tong shi 老子通释 [*Explications of the Laozi*]
Laozi wengui 老子文归 [*Rearranged Text of the Laozi*]
Laozi yan 老子衍 [*The Reduction (to Absurdity) of the Laozi*]
Laozi yanjiu 老子研究 [*Reseach on the Laozi*]
Laozi yanzhai kouyi 老子鬳斋口义 [*Interpretation of the Laozi in Everyday Language by Yanzhai*]
Laozi yi 老子亿 [*Conjecture about the Laozi*]
Laozi yi 老子翼 [*The Wing of the Laozi*]
Laozi yilin 老子意林 [*An Extract of the Laozi*]
Laozi yinyi 老子音义 [*Phonological and Semantic Commentary of the Laozi*)
Laozi yuyi 老子余义 [*Supplementary Meanings of the Laozi*]
Laozi zazhi 老子杂志 [*Miscellaneous Notes on the Laozi*]
Laozi zhangju xin shi 老子章句新释 [*A New Parsing, Organization, and Reading of the Laozi*]
Laozi zhenggu 老子正诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*]
Laozi zhengyi 老子证义 [*Evidenced Interpretation of the Laozi*]
Laozi zhi yao 老子治要 [*Extracts from the Laozi*]
Liezi 列子 [*Writings of Master Lie*]
Lülan 吕览 [*Examinations of Lü*]
Lüshi chunqiu 吕氏春秋 [*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*]
Mawangdui boshu Laozi shitan 马王堆帛书老子试探 [*A Preliminary Investigation into the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi Excavated at Mawangdui*]

Shitan Mawangdui Hanmu zhong de boshu Laozi 试探马王堆汉墓中的帛书老子 [*A Tentative Inquiry into the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi in the Han-dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui*]
Mengzi 孟子 [*Writings of Master Meng*]
Mozi 墨子 [*Writings of Master Mo*]
Mouzi 牟子 [*Writings of Master Mou*]
Nan hua jing jie 南华经解 [*Explanation of the Zhuangzi*]
Qian Yantang wenji 潜研堂文集 [*Writings from the Hall of Secretive Inquiries*]
Qingjing jing 清静经 [*Book of Clarity and Tranquility*]
Shangshu 尚书 [*Book of Documents*]
Shangzi 商子 [*Writings of Master Shang*]
Shenglei 声类 [*Classification of Sounds*]
Shen jian 申鉴 [*Extended Reflections*]
Shen xian zhuan 神仙传 [*Biographies of Deities and Immortals*]
Shi ji 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*]
Shijing 诗经 [*Classic of Poetry*]
Shigu 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*]
Shuowen jiezi 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*]
Shu xu 书序 [*Preface of the Book of Documents*]
Su wen 素问 [*Basic Questions*]
Suo yin 索隐 [*Exploring the Obscurity* (*of the Records of the Grand Historian*)]
Taiping yulan 太平御览 [*Imperial Reader of the Taiping Era*]
Taishang laozi daodejing 太上老子道德经 [*The Grand Supreme Laozi's Daodejing*]
Taishang daode bao zhangyi 太上道德宝章翼 [*Supplements to the Precious Chapters of the Supreme Daodejing*]
Tai shi 泰誓 [*Great Declaration*] in the *Shangshu* 尚书 [*Book of Documents*]
Tao zhouwang jie lao 陶周望解老 [*Tao Zhouwang's Commentary on the Laozi*]
Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben 王安石老子注辑本 [*Wang Anshi's Commentary on the Laozi*]
Wenxuan 文选 [*Selections of Literature*]
Wenzi 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*]
Wu jiang da che 无将大车 [*Don't Push the Ox-drawn Cart*] of the *Shijing* 诗经 [*Classic of Poetry*]
Xiang yin jiu yi 乡饮酒义 [*Meaning of the Drinking Ceremonies in the Districts*]
Xiaojing 孝经 [*Classics of Filial Piety*]
Xici 系辞 [*Appended Remarks*] of the *Yijing* 易经 [*Book of Changes*]
Xuanyan xinji ming lao bu 玄言新记明老部 [*New Remarks on the Dark Words for Clarifying Lao*[*zi*]*'s Text*]
Yan tie lun 盐铁论 [*Discourses on Salt and Iron*]
Yao lüe 要略 [*Outline of the Essentials*] of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*]

Yi lao tongyan 易老通言 [*A Comprehensive Discourse of the Book of Changes and the Laozi*]
Yi zhuan 易传 [*Commentary on the Book of Changes*]
Yi Zhou shu 逸周书 [*Lost Book of Zhou*]
Yili 仪礼 [*Book of Rites*]
Yijing 易经 [*Book of Changes*]
Yinfu jing 阴符经 [*Book of the Hidden Tally*]
Yinzhu Laozi Daodejing 音注老子道德经 [*Phonetic Commentary of the Laozi's Daodejing*]
Yugong 禹贡 [*Tribute of Yu*]
Yu Lan 御览 [*Imperial Reader*]
Yupian 玉篇 [*Jade Chapters*]
Yuan dao 原道 [*Investigating the Dao*]
Yue ji 乐记 [*Book of Music*]
Zhi du 知度 [*Recognizing the Proper Measure*] of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*]
Zhou li 周礼 [*Rites of Zhou*]
Zhouyi 周易 [*Book of Changes*]
Zhouyi Chengshi Zhuan 周易程氏传 [*Cheng Yi's Comments on the Book of Changes*]
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Zhu zi yu lei 朱子语类 [*Teachings of Zhu Xi*]
Zhuzi pingyi 诸子平议 [*Evaluations of the Masters*]
Zuantu huzhu Laozi Daodejing 纂图互注老子道德经 [*Compiled Illustrations and Mutual Interpretations of the Laozi's Daodejing*]

Translator's Introduction

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Why Translate this Book?

The *Laozi* is one of the most translated books in the world, second only to the *Bible*. So why would we endeavor to produce yet another translation? The answer is simple. This translation differs hugely from virtually every other translation in English. Firstly, Chen Guying's annotation and commentary includes not just his own contemporary rendering and interpretation but draws on most of the major *Laozi* scholars since the text was first studied. Chen breaks down the text to the level of individual characters, sometimes going on for pages about a single phrase or word. He analyzes not only those scholars he agrees with, but also those he disagrees with, comparing many different versions of the *Laozi*. No other version of the *Laozi* in English refers to as many classical and contemporary annotations and commentaries as does Chen's. There are translations of Heshang Gong and Wang Bi's commentaries, and some translators have considered various *Laozi* scholars in their own interpretations, but no one has compared the diversity of scholarship Chen does in this single and unified work.

Secondly, in producing our translation of the *Laozi* itself, we not only followed Chen's own interpretation, but followed the style of his text as well. We have left the characters Chen pinpoints in his commentary and explication untranslated, with several meanings in brackets so that the reader may understand the variety of connotations expressed by these characters rather than isolate oneself to a single, often limiting English translation. Maintaining consistency with this style, we opted mainly for direct translations that do not

seem correct for common assumptions. For example *zhi shan* 至善, which can easily be translated into "best," is translated as "utmost good" so that readers may follow our translation of the *Laozi* word-for-character. We hope that this will aid them in analyzing the *Laozi* on the level that Chen does. (We expand on this point in our "A Note to Our Readers" below.)

Thirdly, while another translation of this book does exist, it is outdated and unavailable, incomplete, and does not analyze the *Laozi* or Chen's own work on the level this one does. The earlier translation by Rhett Young and Roger Ames was published in 1977. It has been out of print for several decades, and very few copies can be found. It does not include all of the comments and notes Chen offers and, furthermore, the translation itself does not include the characters themselves and their various definitions within the character analysis. In this way its general style appeals more to casual readers than serious scholars. Our translation also includes the most current English rendering of key philosophical notions—which are much more developed today than they were in the 1970s. (Roger Ames himself was very supportive of this new translation for precisely these reasons.)

For these reasons we think our translation will help satisfy a demand for broad, pluralistic, and layered scholarly explication of the text and ideas of the *Laozi* rather than be simply another rendering of the text itself. Additionally, it will make the many significant contributions by Chinese thinkers to understanding the *Laozi* included herein available for the first time to Western students and scholars. (Further differences between our translation and the Young and Ames translation are mentioned below.)

A Note to Our Readers

In terms of our readers, we had to make a very difficult choice. Our initial thought was to make the book widely readable, allowing anyone interested in the *Laozi* easy access to Chen's work. The introduction, for example, has been translated along these lines. However, while many people would undoubtedly benefit from studying this text, it quickly became clear that the vast majority of the "Commentary and Explanation" sections were far too technical to be eloquently rendered into readily readable English. So we left them, along with the initial translation of the *Laozi* text, technical. The second two sections of each chapter, "Contemporary Translation" and "Argument," are, however, entirely readable, and accessible to a wider audience. Anyone interested in the *Laozi*, including serious scholars and philosophy professors, will find these sections useful.

The initial translation of the *Laozi*, which is very direct, is targeted at serious scholars and scholars of the *Laozi* who have little or no understanding of Chinese. We sacrificed grammar to make it an almost word for word translation, in hopes of allowing the reader to more or less follow along character for word. We tried to capture as much of the ambiguity of the original as possible, while still allowing it to be readable and understandable to readers who are less interested in coming up with their own interpretations. At times this means including definitions of words that are wildly inappropriate alongside more appropriate ones, to give readers a sense of how context-dependent interpretations are, even at the level of single characters (here our translation differs considerably from the Young and Ames translation). This also allows readers to formulate their own version(s). We have no doubt that many readers, and especially professional scholars, will have problems with our choices here, both in terms of choosing this method and its particular application. (It should be noted that not all the translators agreed with this approach, so criticisms should be directed exclusively to the editors.)

Our translation of "Commentary and Explanation" has the same type of readership in mind. This also means that some points may be tedious, such as continually repeating definitions of individual terms, but we think this will be beneficial to those who are studying the Chinese language. Our target audience is people who cannot read the original, and we did not translate for sinologists, philosophy teachers, or professional scholars anymore than anyone else. We have tried to highlight philosophical meanings, and done as much as possible to reflect Chen Guying's interpretation, not our own. So, 有道之人, for example, which could be translated literally as "persons who have the Dao," we have often rendered "someone who is in line with the Dao (有道之人)"—which is consistent with Chen's own reading (see the Introduction). (Again, this is a marked difference between this translation and the Young and Ames translation.) There are two further points to note here. Firstly, that when including Chinese characters in parentheses we did not include the Romanized *pinyin* counterparts. Given today's technology, *pinyin* is not necessary in searching for a term. Additionally, while some students of Chinese rely heavily on *pinyin*, it is widely agreed upon that fixating on *pinyin* is not a good learning method, so we are actively discouraging it. However, when characters appear in the text, with their English translations in brackets, we always include *pinyin*. In the latter case the character is an important issue, so readers should be able to vocalize it in discussions, but in the former case the character is merely a reference. Secondly, most phrases, including "someone who is in line with the Dao (有道之人)," are translated in their context, so some variations do exist. This

is especially true if comparing different chapters, where the chapter, or Chen, focuses more on one or another possible connotation.

We have made a number of (other) potentially controversial decisions. In order to explain our (mis)takes on contentious issues, let me briefly describe our reasoning:

Intertext quotes. Quotes from other chapters are sometimes slightly altered, due to context and/or for ease of reading. This is particularly true of the Introduction.

Names of Chinese scholars. Most names of Chinese scholars we have simply rendered into *pinyin*. However, there are a couple of exceptions. For example, Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan), and Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie), whose names will appear as they are written here.

Versions of the *Laozi*. Various versions of the *Laozi* will follow the formatting for other Chinese texts, so that, for example, the first instance of the "Mawangdui version" in each chapter will read "*Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*]" and then "*Mawangdui* version" after.

Technical terms. Technical terms such as *wu* 无 and *you* 有 will sometimes appear as "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" and "*you* 有 [presence, having being]." But sometimes simply as "non-presence," "lacking," or "non-being" depending on context. A full glossary of important terms is included. (Here we differ from the Young and Ames translation.)

Our use of "Writings of" instead of "Book of" for master's texts, e.g. *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*]. Today in English speaking circles, scholars consider anyone who follows the millennia-long tradition of referring to "masters (子)" texts by associating them with a particular figure extremely naive. Texts such as the *Zhuangzi* are considered as "obviously" written by a number of authors—even by those who are completely unable to read the original. Our use of "Writings of" instead of "Book of" for masters' texts is not an attempt to enter this discussion. It is rather a reflection on how these texts have been understood by the majority of scholars mentioned in this work, and most importantly, by Chen himself.[1]

Our use of traditional and simplified characters. We use traditional characters for the initial *Laozi* quotation, and then simplified characters throughout the rest of the text. This is how Chen's book is organized, so we follow him

1 As an important philosophical side note, it has been suggested that this tradition has been followed so that texts such as the *Laozi* could be thought of as having a single author—someone who could be emulated, a role model.

here. (Again, this marks a difference between our translation and the Young and Ames translation.)

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Paul J. D'Ambrosio
Coloane, Macau, S.A.R.
May 2019

INTRODUCTION

The Formation and Development of Laozi's Philosophy

Chinese philosophy has focused particularly on humanistic and political issues since its inception. Such thought tends to land itself in the moral realm, which has often limited the scope of discussion. The most distinctive aspect of the *Laozi*, however, lies in its expansion of this discussion to range from everyday human life to the cosmos in its entirety. The *Laozi* looks at human questions from a macroscopic perspective, and yet also peers into the details of many finer aspects our lives.

The development of the *Laozi*'s systematic philosophy can thus be seen as a political outlook founded in a cosmological examination of human life. Understanding the true motivation behind the formation of the *Laozi*'s thought, however, leads us to see its metaphysics as designed to fulfill human and political needs.[1]

The foundation of Laozi's philosophy is developed through his concept of the Dao (道). The Dao, however, is a contrived conception with deliberate aims. Laozi presupposes his concept of the Dao along with its many characteristics and functions. These characteristics and functions are based in Laozi's recognition of natural patterns of the experiential world, and their attribution to the Dao thus allows us to see the Dao as the conglomeration of these patterns. Of course, we can also see the Dao as the true voice of human life. The Dao is a theory developed to accommodate or meet the intrinsic needs and desires of human life.

1 This view was presented by Xu Fuguan 徐复观 (d. 1982) in his *Zhongguo Renxinglun Shi* 中国人性论史 [*On the History of Human Nature in China*]: "The motivation and aim of study of Laozi does not lie in establishing a cosmology, but rather remains an inquiry that the moves gradually upward from human needs into the foundation and source of the cosmos as a place of settlement for human life. Thus, Daoist cosmology can be said to be a byproduct of its philosophy of life. Laozi not only wants to identify the foundation of humanity in that of the cosmos, he also wants to establish an outlook on life that sees correspondence between humanity and this foundation in order to attain a secure foothold for human life." (In Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998), *Lao-Zhuang Lun Ji* 老庄论集 [Collected Works on the Laozi and Zhuangzi], Qilu Shushe, 1987, p. 86.)

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Below I analyze and elaborate on certain major elements of Laozi's basic theories. This will allow us to see how Laozi's philosophical system extends progressively from the metaphysical to the human and political. In doing so, Laozi puts forth numerous major concepts that aim to serve as practical guidance for actual human life.[2]

1 The Many Meanings of "*Dao*"

The Dao is the central concept of Laozi's philosophy. Laozi develops his entire philosophical system on his presupposed concept of the Dao. While the character for the Dao (道) is written uniformly throughout the text, its meaning and connotations differ between chapters and even within sentences.[3] In some places the character "*dao* 道" refers to a metaphysical entity understood as ultimate true existence.[4] In other places, it seems to refer to a type of rule or principle, often reflected in natural laws or patterns. In yet other locations, *dao* refers to standards, norms or exemplary models for human life. Therefore, while all refer to the same [character] *dao*, their connotations and implications are often not entirely the same. Yet, despite these differences, we can trace certain qualities common to *dao* in all its aspects. Below I discuss and attempt to elucidate each of these various aspects of *dao*.[5]

2 Tr. note: The majority of this introduction was translated by Robert Carleo, and edited by Paul J. D'Ambrosio and Ouyang Xiao.

3 In *Zhongguo Zhexue Yuanlun* 中国哲学原论 [*The Origin of Chinese Philosophy*], Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (d. 1978) differentiates between six meanings of *dao* in the *Laozi*: *dao* of empty principle (虚理之道), the metaphysical substance of the Dao (形上道体), the Dao as it manifests within the world of things (道相之道), *dao* as the way of unity with virtue (同德之道), the Dao as the way of cultivation of virtue (修德之道), and the Dao as the way of living (生活之道). Here we see the Dao to serve as the condition of things of the world as well as the internal psychological horizon of human character.

4 "True existence" (实存) in the sense of "the Dao of true existence" possesses metaphysical qualities. These metaphysical qualities are things that do not belong to the world of material form. These aspects of the Dao have no definite formal embodiment, and correspondingly they also have no truly or fully suitable appellations. We have no way of using our sensory functions to directly contact their existence.

5 Tr. note: We will variously refer to "*dao*" and "the Dao" to reflect Chen's understanding. In the original Chinese all senses are written as simply 道.

1.1 *The* Dao *as Ultimate True Existence*

1.1.1 Description of the Substance of the *Dao*

Laozi sees the Dao as an actual, existing thing. He states this clearly in the following three chapters of the *Laozi*:[6]

> [One] looks but does not see, the name is "minute;"
> [one] listens but does not hear, the name is "silent;"
> [one] gropes but does not get, the name is "subtle."
> These three—cannot be investigated;
> thus, they are muddled and one.
> Above it, [it is] not bright, sparkling;
> underneath it, [it is] not dark, to conceal.
> Like a string, [it] cannot be named,
> [it] goes back to no-thing (无物).
> This is called a shapeless shape, a no-thing (无物) figure.
> This is called indistinct indistinctness.
> Approach it—[and you] do not see its head.
> Follow it—[and you] do not see its back.
> Grasp the Dao of old in order to ride today's *you* 有 [presence, having, being].
> To be able to know the ancient beginning,
> this is called the thread(s) of the Dao. (Chapter 14)[7]

> The Dao as a thing is indistinct. Indistinct, yet there are marks in its midst; indistinct, yet there are actual things in its midst. Profound and dark, yet there is seminal material in its midst; dark and profound, yet there is something reliable in its midst. (Chapter 21)

> There is an undifferentiated and unitary thing existing prior to the formation of heaven and earth. Its sound cannot be heard, nor can its form be seen. It stands alone and is ever existing, operates cyclically and is ceaselessly generative, capable of being the root and source of heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things. I do not know its name; forced, I call it the Dao. (Chapter 25)

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6 Tr. note: Translations of the *Laozi* chapters given in the introduction follow Chen's reading, but are not rendered exactly the same as in his breakdown of them in the main body of the text. See the translator's introduction for our reasoning.

7 Tr. note: Quotes from the *Laozi* in this section will refer either to the translation we give below, a modified version of that translation, or our translation of Chen's own "contemporary translation." We reference all of these translations and try to use the one which fits Chen's explanation best. No major departures exist.

Thus, Laozi tells us there is an undifferentiated entity of which he doesn't know the name but which he will refer to as the Dao for lack of a better option. But why doesn't he know its name? Because we cannot hear its sound or see its shape. In other words, it is not an entity with concrete form. The *Guanzi* 管子 [*Book of Master Guan*] tells us, "When a thing is fixed, it has shape; when its shape is fixed, it has a name." The naming of a thing follows its having form. As the Dao lacks definite form, it therefore remains unnamable.

If the inability to name the Dao arises from its formlessness, why then does Laozi presume the Dao to be formless? Because if the Dao were to have form, then it would have to be an entity existing in specific time and space. However, entities that exist in specific time and place all enter existence (or are born), leave existence (or die) and transform. Laozi sees the Dao as everlasting or constant (常) in its existence, and therefore must affirm the Dao to be formless. Laozi's repeated declarations of the unnamability of the Dao are due to the fact that naming the Dao would necessarily delimit it. As the Dao is limitless, it is thus not possible to truly name it. Ordinarily, we use names to refer to certain specific things, and after naming these things, we cannot refer to them as certain other things. For example, we have designated the term "jasmine" to refer to the jasmine plant, and thus do not call it by the name "rose" or "tulip." Since we cannot delimit the Dao, we therefore have no way of designating it with language. This is why in the first chapter of the received text Laozi tells us "The Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant '*Dao*.' The name that can be named is not the constant 'name.'" The true and constant Dao cannot be spoken of or expressed in concepts. Laozi uses the term "*dao*" to refer to it only for the sake of convenience.

The Dao, although it is without fixed form and transcends our senses and intelligence, nevertheless is not simply nothing at all. Chapter 21 has told us that the Dao includes "form," "things" and "essence". Thus the Dao is actual substance of existence, and even an actually existing entity. Laozi also clarifies that this actual substance of existence is singular and absolute for our cosmos (whereas the "myriad things" of existence are diverse and relative). It is of itself everlasting and constant. It will not follow the transformation of other entities in leaving existence, nor can it be caused to change by any external force. As Chapter 25 informs us, "It stands alone and is ever existing." In this aspect, many have compared Laozi's Dao with the Greek philosopher Parmenides's concept of "Being." This resemblance can be misleading, as Parmenides's "Being" is not only single, absolute and constant, but also unmoving and unchanging. Laozi's Dao, on the other hand, is not fixed and unchanging, but rather continuously active and moving: "It goes around everywhere and is free from exhaustion." The Dao is a transformative and dynamic entity. It is itself

continuously shifting and changing, and from this continuous transformation generates the cosmos.

1.1.2 The Generation of the Cosmos

Laozi tells us that the Dao exists prior to heaven and earth, undifferentiated and yet complete. The existential[8] substance of the Dao not only existed before to the formation of the cosmos, but also created the myriad things of the world. Numerous chapters of the *Laozi* clearly establish the Dao as the source or basis for the creation of the myriad things.

> "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" is the name of the beginning of heaven and earth.
>
> "*You* 有 [presence, having, being]" is the name of the mother of all things. (Chapter 1)
>
> The Dao is empty, but use it and it might never fill.
> So abysmal!
> Like the ancestor of the ten thousand things. (Chapter 4)
>
> All things in the world are generated from being,
> Being is generated from nonbeing. (Chapter 40)
>
> The Dao generates oneness.
> Oneness generates twoness.
> Twoness generates threeness.
> Threeness generates all things. (Chapter 42)
>
> The Dao generates them, virtuosity (德) nourishes them,
> Things give shape to them, brings them to completion.
>
> This is why none of the ten thousand things do not revere the Dao and value virtuosity. The Dao is revered as such, and virtuosity is valued as such, as [they] command nothing and always are self-so (自然).
>
> Therefore the Dao generates them, virtuosity nourishes them; lets them grow and feeds them; makes them complete and matures them, nurtures them and shields them. (Chapter 51)

8 Tr. note: Chen sometimes uses the English "existential" to refer to 实存 or 存在, so both terms have been translated into "existential." The use of "existential" should not be confused with the way it is used in "existentialist philosophy"—which is focused on human existence. It should also be noted that Chen sometimes uses the word "existential" himself in brackets next to these Chinese terms.

Laozi sees the Dao as the foundation of all existence ("the ancestor of the myriad things") as well as the source of all being. The Dao is the primordial natural force, and possesses inexhaustible potential and generative capacity. The vibrant generation and development of the myriad things are an expression of the continuous creation of the Dao's potential. From the endless vivacity and flourishing of the things of the world we witness the Dao's boundless vitality.

In Laozi's assertion of successive generation through the Dao of one, two, three and the myriad things, we can see one, two, and three as simply descriptive of the process of the Dao generating the world. The Dao descends level by level into our world of concrete actuality to create the things of the world. Once it has done so, it must moreover foster their development, bringing them to maturity, nurturing and protecting them. In this way we see that the Dao does not merely give birth to the world, but also remains immanent within entities in order to foster and nurture their existence.

Laozi understands the Dao as unsurpassable in quality or temporality. It is not restricted by space or time and not influenced by the transformation of things of the world, including their formation and destruction or coming into and passing out of existence. From this we see that the Dao is transcendent. From its creation, support, and nurturing of the things of the world, we also see that the Dao is immanent in all things.

The Dao generates the cosmos and all within it. In the first and fourteenth chapters we find that the named and nameless, being and nonbeing all refer to the Dao. Here, being and nonbeing (有 and 无) refer to specific concepts of Laozi's philosophy. The two seem mutually opposed, and yet also to hold a relation of continuity. Nonbeing carries within it an unlimited and unmanifest potential for creation, and even the boundless possibility of being. Laozi differentiates between being and nonbeing in order to express the process of the metaphysical Dao descending into existence to create the myriad things of the world.

Why does Laozi use being and nonbeing to refer to the Dao? Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249), in his annotation of Chapter 14, tells us:

> One wishes to say that it does not exist? [The fact still remains] that the entities are based on it for their completion. One wants to say it exists? [The fact still remains] that it does not show its form. That is why [the text] says: "shape of the shapeless, appearance of the no-thing."[9]

9 Rudolf Wagner, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing*, Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2003, p. 163.

In other words, it is because the Dao "does not show its form" that Laozi uses "nonbeing" to describe it. However, this *the Dao* that "does not show its form" is simultaneously the basis for the existence of things, and therefore Laozi also designates the Dao as "being." It is clear then that Laozi's "nonbeing" does not refer to nothingness, but simply references concealed or undifferentiated aspects of the Dao that remain unknowable to us. Thus, as we are unable to experience these aspects of the Dao through our senses or express them as concepts, Laozi resorts to referring to the Dao with the term "nonbeing." In consideration of the Dao's generation of and immanence within all things, Laozi also adopts "being" to refer to the Dao. Summarily, then, being and nonbeing both refer to the Dao and express the Dao's continuously active process of moving successively from levels of formless nonbeing to formed being.[10]

1.2 Dao *as Patterns of Regularity*

The entity of the Dao is indeed formless and unseen, indistinct and not an explicit guide that can be followed. However, when it operates through the things of the world it exhibits certain patterns of regularity. This regularity is able to serve as criterion by which to evaluate human behavior. Therefore, in the *Laozi* we find not only descriptions of the existential nature of the Dao; many places also further discuss the Dao in terms of its patterns of regularity.

Laozi tells us, "Returning is the movement of the Dao" (Chapter 40). He sees the natural activity and transformation of things as all following certain patterns, one of the most general of which is "returning." Things develop in opposite directions, but this development will always eventually return to an original fundamental state. As the process of returning necessitates a former process of leaving, heading towards an opposite is also implicit in this movement. Thus, the Chinese character here for "returning" (反) implies both oppositeness (相反) and returning (返回). That is, "returning" as the movement of the Dao includes two major concepts: 1. Relative opposition; and 2. Returning to an original state. These will be elaborated on in their respective sections below.

1.2.1 Patterns of Transformation between Opposites

Laozi believes all phenomena are formed through conditions of binary opposition. For example, he states:

10 Xu Fuguan tells us, "The process of creation of the cosmos and its myriad things exhibits the process of *dao*'s decent from being without material form (无形质) toward having material form (有形质)" (Xu Fuguan 徐复观, *Zhongguo Renxinglun Shi* 中国人性论史 [*On the History of Human Nature in China*], p. 337).

> *Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] generate each other;
> difficult and easy complete each other;
> long and short shape each other;
> above and below fill each other;
> tones and voices harmonize [with] each other;
> before and after follow each other. (Chapter 2)

Existential values in the human realm are formed through the interreliance of oppositional complementarity. For example, the above passage opens:

> All under the sky know beautiful as beautiful;
> then [there is] already ugly;
> all know good as good;
> then [there is] already not good. (Chapter 2)

Laozi believes all things each have an opposite aspect. They are also formed through this opposite. He moreover sees this formation through oppositional complementarity as the force driving the transformation and development of things. Furthermore, Laozi explains this condition of interreliant opposition as often involving transformation from one aspect to the other. He tells us:

> How misfortunate!, that on which fortune leans;
> How fortunate!, that in which misfortune hides. (Chapter 58)

Unfortunate disasters and good fortune are mutually causal. This recalls the *Huainanzi*'s 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] story of the man who lost his horse, which shows the essential interrelatedness of good and bad fortune. In this parable, the old man's horse wanders off and others express condolences, to which he asks, "How do you know this was bad luck?" Not long after, the horse returns leading more fine horses back with it. When others congratulate the man, he responds, "How do you know this was good luck?" The story repeats again in this manner: the man's son breaks his leg horseback riding, but then avoids battle due to his injury and has his life spared. We thus see the ease of shifting between good and bad fortune and even recognize that each serves as the basis of the other.

The ordinary person sees only the superficial level of things, and fails to examine the deeper level on which things harbor the potential for their opposites. Therefore, Laozi understands misfortune as always possibly containing the seeds of good fortune, and good fortune as possibly holding the ingredients

of adversity. This fact of life can be seen throughout the experiential world. We often find times of hardship kindle extraordinary will and ambition in people that leads them to great success. We also regularly see the most fortunate of circumstances facilitating people to develop laziness and other bad habits that lead to decadence and decline. Throughout the world we find intertransformation between opposites similar to such a dynamic of mutual causation between good and bad fortune.

Laozi believes all things repeatedly intertransform or alternate between their states of opposition. This process of recurring interchange is unending.

Why does Laozi emphasize the oppositional condition of things and transformation to opposites? For precisely the following reasons:

1. Laozi believes things are created through oppositional relationships. Therefore, in examining and understanding things, we must look not only at their present, manifest, or positive aspects, but also at the oppositional complements of these aspects. Only in taking such dualistic aspects together can we be said to fully understand the entirety of any single thing. People often focus on only one side (or one extreme) of a thing, but Laozi reminds us of the deep value of grasping or coming to terms with the present aspect of an entity through its relationship with its opposite.

2. Laozi not only calls on us to understand things in terms of their opposites in order to see their deeper implications, but at the same time also points out the importance of the role of this opposite aspect. He even believes that if we are able to grasp this opposite side it will prove more valuable than the present aspect. For example, in the oppositions of male and female, front and back, high and low, being and nonbeing, people generally flaunt manliness, struggle to get ahead, climb upwards, and grasp at what is rather than what is not. Laozi, on the other hand, encourages us to preserve femininity, fall back, take the lower position and value nonbeing. Laozi believes that preserving femininity is more valuable than and will overcome flaunting strength, and that falling back overcomes struggling to get ahead. He explains that the lower is the foundation of the higher, and that without the stability and support of this base, the higher will collapse. He further points out that "therefore, presence/being benefits, non-presence/nonbeing functions" (Chapter 11). Without nonbeing, being would be completely useless. These examples illustrate the superiority of "opposite" aspects of things over their "present" aspects.

3. Laozi believes that when things develop to a certain limit or extreme, they change their original state and transform into their opposite. This is the concept of the ancient saying "when things reach their extreme they must reverse" (物极必反). The peak of strength and acme of prosperity are also the points at which things turn toward decline. Laozi states:

> Those who want to gather something in,
> Must first expand and open it outward;
> Those who want to weaken something,
> Must first make it strong and prosperous;
> Those who want to get rid of something,
> Must first raise it up;
> Those who want to take something away,
> Must first give it away.
> These are subtle indicating omens. (Chapter 36)

This passage tells us, if we desire constriction, there must first be expansion; if we desire deterioration, there must first be prosperity; if we desire to depose, a thing must first be raised up; if we desire to take something away, that thing must first be given. This is anticipatory prefiguring. This passage is an explication of the concept of "when things reach their extreme they must reverse." All things of the world exhibit reversal when they approach their extreme. This can be seen in the waning of the moon, which first requires it to be full (a full moon prefigures waning). For a lamp to be extinguished, it must first be burning (the lamp's burning prefigures its extinction). For a flower to wilt and wither, it must first blossom (the blooming of a flower prefigures its wilting). These are all the natural tendencies of things. In facing many situations, understanding the principle that what flourishes must decline allows us to take preemptive steps in avoiding calamity and gives us an advantage in being able to anticipate the movement of events.

In terms of the pattern of movement toward opposites, Laozi has a lot to say. He states, for example,

> What is broken is that which can be preserved,
> and the bent can be extended.
> The hollow can be filled,
> the worn out can be renewed.
> By taking less,
> one can gain more,
> but greed only leads to confusion. (Chapter 22)

As well as,

> Thus things are sometimes diminished as they are benefited,
> Or are benefitted as they are diminished. (Chapter 42)

These both employ and explicate the idea of shifting toward opposites. Laozi also states,

> The Dao of heaven (天之道) it resembles stretching of a bow?
> High, it suppresses, low it raises, when it is not enough, it compensates.
> The Dao of heaven (天之道), loses have excess, and compensate what is not enough.
> The Dao of humans (人知道), is not like this, decreasing those which have not enough in order to enrich those who have surplus. (Chapter 77)

Laozi believes in a regularity of natural patterns. Where there is diminishing, surplus arises to make up for deficiencies. This explains the first meaning of *fan* "returning" as the movement of The Dao.

To summarize the above, Laozi believes the Dao exhibits a type of regularity in that its movement and development is transformation toward an opposite aspect as well as progressing toward an opposite direction. When the Dao functions through things of the world, these things accord with its patterns of transformation in their movement.

1.2.2 Patterns of Cyclicality

Laozi emphasizes the diametric relationships between things and the role of their transformation toward reversal and their opposite aspects. This major element of Laozi's thought constitutes part of his philosophical emphasis on returning to an original, primordial state.

This sense of returning refers to the second implication of *fan*, that of "returning," which reinforces Laozi's promotion of the idea of cyclicality (周行). Regarding this aspect of "returning" Laozi states, "Returning is the movement of the Dao." He also tells us that the Dao's movement is cyclical, as well as that cyclical movement is an expression of one of the Dao's patterns of regularity. Laozi discusses this cyclical movement of the Dao in Chapters 25 and 16:

> There is a thing formed undifferentiatedly, born before heaven and earth. […]
>
> It stands alone and is ever existing, operates cyclically and is ceaselessly generative […]
>
> I do not know its name; forced, I call it the Dao. Forced again, I dub it great. It is large and borderless, and thus ceaselessly circulating; ceaselessly circulating, and thus extending far; extending far, and thus returning to the original source. (Chapter 25)

> Attain ultimate emptiness, preserve unmatchable tranquility.
> The ten thousand things arise in unison;
> I observe how they return, resume.
> All things [come forth] so numerously;
> Each of them returning to their roots.
> Returning to the root is called tranquility.
> Tranquility is called returning to destiny.
> Going back to the mandate is called constant.
> Knowing constancy is called brightness.
> If one does not know constancy, one acts recklessly, which leads to misfortune. (Chapter 16)

In describing the Dao, Laozi tells us that it goes around and is free from danger. The "round" (周) of its going around[11] refers to a circle, and thus movement of circularity. The line, then, tells us that the Dao in its cyclical movement is never in danger of exhaustion. In this same chapter, Laozi describes this process as:

> I do not know its name; forced, I call it the Dao. Forced again, I dub it great. It is large and borderless, and thus ceaselessly circulating; ceaselessly circulating, and thus extending far; extending far, and thus returning to the original source. (Chapter 25)

This further clarifies what is meant by the Dao going around being free from danger, telling us that the Dao is endlessly expansive, all things arise as "great" through it, all things after separating out through the Dao circulate continuously in their movement of "borderless." This movement increasingly distances things from the Dao, leaving them "far (away)," and at this extreme they must turn back, returning again to their original point. In this way, departing and returning form a full cycle of "circulating."

The "returning" (復) of chapter 16 also refers to this "circulating." Laozi sees a pattern of cyclical leaving and returning in the vital generation and development of the myriad things ("The ten thousand things arise in unison; I observe how they return, resume.") He believes the profusion of the things of the world ultimately each return to their root ("All things [come forth] so numerously;

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11 Tr. note: In Chinese, 周行而不殆. Wing-Tsit Chan translates this line, "It operates everywhere and is free from danger." Chen differs in his reading of *zhouxing* 周行 here, and reads *zhou* 周 as a noun referring to a circle or verb meaning to complete a circle rather than "everywhere." However, Chen would agree that the Dao is all pervasive, and we therefore have opted for a translation that includes both interpretations, as the original does.

each of them returning to their roots.") Here we are able to understand that Laozi's "returning" contains implications of returning to a thing's root. Why does Laozi advocate returning to "roots"? What kind of a condition does a thing's "root" refer to? Laozi believes that "root" is a state of empty tranquility ("Returning to the root is called tranquility.") Laozi sees the Dao as according with natural patterns, and this empty tranquility as a natural condition. Following the Dao's creation of the myriad things, the movement and development of the things of the world become increasingly distant from the Dao and this distance leads them to become increasingly out of accord with natural patterns. The troubles and conflicts of the things of the world are all expressions of this lack of accordance with natural patterns. Therefore, only returning to the root and maintaining empty tranquility allows things to embody natural tendencies and avoid such trouble and conflict. The concepts of emptiness and tranquility will be dealt with in the following section.

The Dao's patterns of regularity discussed above illuminate the accordance of the Dao and the myriad things it operates through with the following principles through the concept of "returning":

1. The movement of things towards their opposite
2. Cyclical movement and returning to an original state

Additionally, Laozi tells us:

> Sparse words is self-so (自然).
>
> That is why [violently] blowing wind does not last the morning, why sudden [heavy] rain does not last all day. Who has made it so? Heaven and earth. But even heaven and earth cannot make something last, let alone human beings. (Chapter 23)

> The soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong. (Chapter 36)

> Those who act will be defeated, those who cling will lose it. (Chapter 29)

These lines tell us that action taken through forcefulness will always fail, and increasing one's grip on something will result in losing it. These are also all natural patterns of regularity. Laozi tells us that understanding such natural regularity is equivalent to knowing "constancy" (常). (*Chang* refers to the unchanging regularity of the transformation of things.) He tells us that we ought to act in accordance with these natural patterns of regularity, and that if we opt to behave recklessly rather than heeding natural regularity, trouble will result. ("To know the constant is to be wise. Not to know the constant is to be reckless and wild; If you're reckless and wild, your actions will lead to misfortune.")

1.3 *The* Dao *as a Standard of Human Living*

The metaphysical Dao is unable to be directly processed through cognition or sensory experience. This unseen and uncommunicated Dao, however, immensely affects us in its workings in the phenomenological world. The Dao's working through all things expresses its many characteristics. The fundamental characteristics expressed by the Dao are capable of serving as standards for human behavior. In this way, in the metaphysical Dao's gradual descent to the level of human life to serve as a criterion for evaluating action in the human world, it also becomes a method of human living and manner of conduct. The Dao on this level has already cast off its metaphysical coloring. As though descended from the clouds, it can be used stably and reliably by humankind.

The metaphysical Dao, in its decent into the world of things and employment in human life can also be understood as *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]. The relationship between the Dao and *de* is that they are two aspects of a single thing. Laozi develops the idea of form or body (体) and function (用) to illuminate the relationship between the Dao and *de*. *De* is the function of the Dao, as well as its expression. The undifferentiated Dao in the act of creation transforms itself as immanent in the myriad things, becoming each thing's individual nature (属性). This is *de*. Put simply, the Dao as manifest in the world of experience is *de*. Therefore, the expressed characteristics of the metaphysical Dao that are experienced and used by humans can be collectively understood as falling within the realm of the activity of *de*. Here, we can also draw a distinction between the Dao and *de* along the lines that the Dao refers to a natural condition that no human action has ever permeated to any degree, whereas *de* interacts with factors of human action but nevertheless returns to its natural state (showing the aspect of the Daoist phrase "*daode*" that emphasizes following nature, which differs entirely from the Confucian stress on ethics based in interhuman relations).

As mentioned, *de* is the level of the Dao that descends into the human realm to serve as a standard of human life. (Although the *Laozi* nevertheless also refers to this as the Dao, this aspect of the Dao is synonymous with *de*.) Now we must ask: Precisely what fundamental characteristics and basic spirit does the Dao possess as the object of accordance for human behavior (that is, as *de*)? Laozi believes in and promotes a great many expressions of the Dao's fundamental characteristics and spirit: self-so and non-action; emptiness and tranquility; creation without ownership; acting without holding on to, depending on, or boasting about achievement; fostering without ruling; softness and not struggling; taking the lower position; taking the rear; kindness, frugality, and simplicity. Of these, the concepts of self-so and non-action are the core of the *Laozi*'s thought, and the other major concepts listed above all revolve around and are developed on these central notions. Self-so and non-action

involve free development that follows a thing's individual condition that is not restricted by external coercion. These concepts will be discussed and explicated in detail in Part Three below.

Next, I will list out the passages from the *Laozi* that mention the Dao and examine which of the above aspects of the Dao are brought out in each context.

2 The Uses of the Term "*Dao*"

The term "*dao*" appears 73 times throughout the *Laozi*. These 73 occurrences of *dao*, despite the consistency of the character that is written, are not completely alike in the meaning they aim to express. Examining these appearances of *dao* allows us to see the deeper strains running between the term's many individual uses in its various passages. Following the order of the received Wang Bi version, I will now examine each of the places in which the character "*dao*" appears in order to help draw out the full implications of the concept.

Chapter 1:

> The Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant "Dao."

The meaning of this line is that the Dao that can be communicated through language is not the constant *dao* (常道). The word "spoken" in the phrase "that can be spoken of" is also the character *dao*. Thus, the original reads literally, "The Dao that can be *dao*-ed is not the constant Dao." This second occurrence of *dao* in this sentence, however, is unrelated to Laozi's philosophical concept of the Dao. Rather, it simply means "to speak of." The first and third occurrences of *dao* here, on the other hand, refer to the specific conception of "the Dao" in Laozi's thought. This *dao* composes the actual particular entities of the world while being simultaneously the force that creates the cosmos. It exists eternally and is therefore referred to as "the constant Dao." Therefore, "*dao*" used in this way clearly refers to the Dao in the sense of the ultimate true existence.

Chapter 4:

> The Dao is empty, but use it and it might not never fill up, full.
> So abysmal!
> Like the ancestor of the ten thousand things.

This chapter describes the substance of the Dao as empty. This empty entity of the Dao is the source of the myriad things of the world. The Dao as spoken of here refers to the metaphysical Dao of true existence.

Chapter 8:

> Water is good because it benefits the ten thousand things without engaging in contending. Because it abides in places loathed by the multitudes, it approaches the Dao.

The Dao here exhibits the quality of not competing. This non-competing Dao differs from the metaphysical Dao of true existence. The Dao here expresses the quality of "not contending." This Dao of "not contending" is not the same as the Dao of true metaphysical existence. The Dao of true metaphysical existence is unknowable to us, whereas the Dao spoken of here has already descended to the human realm, and is useable to us. Laozi believes we should adopt this Dao's spirit of "not struggling." (On this level "the Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].)

Chapter 9:

> Holding and filling it is not as good as finishing;
> To beat it and sharpen it, it cannot preserve anything for long.
> A hall filled to the brim with gold and jade, there is none who can guard it.
> When wealth and honor lead to arrogance, one invites disaster upon oneself.
> Achievements accomplish and then the body retires, that is the Dao of heaven.

In the second and fourth pairs here (beating can not preserve and arrogance bringing disaster) Laozi warns against immodesty. The penultimate line in the received Wang Bi version reads only when "achievements accomplish and then the body retires." Laozi believes this represents the Dao of heaven. The Dao as spoken of here connotes a spirit of modest giving way (weakness) and not struggling or contending. (On this level of meaning "the Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].)

Chapter 14:

> Grasp the Dao of old in order to ride today's *you* 有 [presence, having, being].
> To be able to know the ancient beginning, this is called the thread(s) of the Dao

"The thread(s) of the Dao" refers to the regularity of "the Dao." The two references to the Dao here both refer to "the Dao's" patterns of regularity.

The near entirety of this chapter that precedes this closing statement describes at length the Dao of true metaphysical existence. This last section immediately follows to tell us that we should grasp onto the long-standing, age-old ways of the Dao in dealing with the particular events of the present. In this way, both mentions of the Dao here should be seen as referring to the Dao in terms of its regular patterns. The "thread(s) of the Dao" (the Dao's regularity) here can moreover be seen as the regularity expressed by the Dao in its true existence. While the entity of the Dao in its true existence is unknowable to us, we can still follow or accord with it in the patterns of regularity it expresses through the things of the world.

Chapter 15:[12]

> In ancients times, those who excelled at being scholars, were subtle, mysterious and profound, thorough and too deep to fathom.
>
> But only because they remain unfathomable, one strives to describe them:
>
> Cautious and careful, as if they were crossing a river in wintertime;
> How vigilant, as if they fear their neighbors in all four directions;
> How solemn, as if they were guests here;
> How scattered, supple, to slacken, like thawing ice;
> How sturdy, like an uncarved piece of wood;
> How boundless, like a deep valley;
> How turbid, like the muddy waters;
>
> Who can remain tranquil within the murkiness and slowly (徐) clear up? Who can move from the rest and slowly grow?
>
> If one preserves this Dao, there will be no desire for fullness. It is only because there is no fullness that the worn-out can be renewed (蔽而新成).

"If one preserves this Dao, there will be no desire for fullness. It is only because there is no fullness that the worn-out can be renewed." Here, saying that the Dao "has no fullness" and that this should be held-fast and preserved, means not to be self-satisfied, in this way one can get rid of what is old and accept what is new.

The lines that follow "preserving this" are possibly mixed up. These lines are about not being self-satisfied ("having no fullness"). Additionally, the lines above these describe "those who excelled at being scholars in ancients times." So we could say that the words in these two sections are completely

12 Tr. note: The rest of this section was translated by Paul J. D'Ambrosio.

unrelated. That is why I suspect that "preserving this Dao" and the lines that follow belong to another chapter and were mistakenly put here.

If we say that the line "if one preserves this Dao, there will be no desire for fullness" continues what was written above, then this "Dao" should indicate what is said after "one strives to describe them" about the scholar's manner and attitude. It should be about being careful and cautious, alert and vigilant, reserved and stern, amiable and kind, honest and unadorned, wide and expansive, simple and sincere, deep and profound, and other aspects of the cultivated person's realm.

Chapter 16:

> Attain ultimate vacuity, preserve unmatchable tranquility….
>
> Knowing constancy is tolerance, tolerance leads to impartiality, commonality leads to completeness, what is complete is heavenly, what is heavenly is the Dao. The Dao endures.

Here both instances of "the Dao" indicate a natural Dao. The lines "What is heavenly is the Dao. The Dao endures," means that the "heavenly" which is nature, conforms to the natural "Dao" and that this endures.

The major arguments in this chapter deal with "vacuity" and "tranquility." Laozi thinks that "ultimate vacuity" and "unmatchable tranquility" are in line with the natural "Dao."

Chapter 18:

> When the great Dao is abandoned, there is humaneness and righteousness (义); when wisdom and knowledge appear, there is great falsity.[13]

The great Dao being abandoned is a result of the rulers using "conscious" or "assertive" action (有为). Here "the great Dao" indicates the "self-so, non-action (自然无为)" Dao. Abandoning the "self-so, non-action" Dao and employing "assertive action" politics (rulers' forcefulness and committing outrageous actions, exercising their own wants and desires, expanding their own interests and profits, and being coercive towards the people, this is what Laozi means by "assertive action" politics), society becomes chaotic, human relations fall apart, and so humaneness and righteousness (义) are called in.

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13 Tr. note: "When wisdom and knowledge appear, there is great falsity (智慧出，有大伪。)" does not appear in Chen's version (compare with Chapter 18).

Chapter 21:

> Great efficacy's (德) manner follows only the Dao.
> The Dao as a thing—only indistinct (恍), indistinct (惚).

Laozi thinks that the Dao, this thing, is indistinct and without any definite shape; although it actually exists, it is not something we can be sure about. Both instances of "the Dao" here indicate metaphysical existence.

Chapter 23:

> Sparse words is self-so (自然).
>
> That is why blowing wind does not last the morning, why sudden rain does not last all day. Who has made it so? Heaven and earth. But even heaven and earth cannot make something last, let alone human beings. Therefore, a person who engages in the Dao becomes identical to the Dao.... One who obtains will also be happy by attaining the Dao.[14]

Here the four instances of "the Dao" obviously indicate the "self-so, non-action (自然无为)" Dao.

Laozi thinks that "sparse words" (which means not giving governmental orders) is in line with "self-so." Tyrannical governments, like crazy strong wind and heavy rain, cannot be maintained for very long. If the government can be "self-so, non-action" then society will be self-so—i.e. of itself—peaceful and calm.

Chapter 24:

> Those who to stand on tiptoe cannot stand, those who stride cannot walk. Those who make themselves appear remain dim, those who consider themselves as right do not shine forth, those who are conceited accomplish nothing, those who boast of themselves cannot endure.
>
> When such attitudes are applied to the Dao, it is described as leftover food superfluous shapes. Such things are detestable, and someone who possesses the Dao does not put themselves in this position.

14 Tr. note: "One who obtains will also be happy by attaining the Dao (同于道者，道亦乐得之。)" differs from Chen's version (compare with Chapter 16).

Here Laozi is warning people not to boast about themselves, but to be reserved about oneself. The connotations of "the Dao" in this chapter have to do with these warnings (and on this level "the Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]).

Chapter 25:

> There is a thing formed undifferentiatedly, born before heaven and earth. [...]
> I do not know its name; forced, I term it the Dao. Forced to name it, I say great. [...]
> Thus, the Dao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Man is also great. In the cosmos, there are four greats, and humans are one of them.

"The Dao" being discussed here is the existential Dao. The last sentence "Heaven models the Dao, the Dao models self-so (天法道，道法自然)" indicates that following the existential Dao, natural or self-so (自然) regulatory patterns emerge.

Chapter 30:

> When the Dao is used to assist the people's sovereign, one does not overpower the world with armies. Such affairs are bound to return. Where troops are stationed, there thistles and thorns will grow. [After a great battle, years of famine will inevitably ensue.]
>
> One who is good has *guo* 果 [fruit, result] but leaves it at that, [one] does not dare to control and overpower. [One] is successful but shows reserve, [one] is successful but does not brag, [one] is successful but does not become arrogant, [one] is successful but it remains beyond one's control, [one] is successful but does not overpower.
>
> When things are robust they will grow old, this is called what is not Dao, and what is not Dao will end early.

"The Dao" can be used to help the sovereign. Here "the Dao" indicates the soft "Dao" and no-striving "Dao" it does not overpower, warning not to brag or be arrogant.

"Things are robust" means showing off and flaunting. In this chapter "the Dao" very clearly warns against showing off, flaunting, and overpowering. Showing off, flaunting, and overpowering are not in line with "the Dao." (On this level "the Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].)

Chapter 31:

> Now as for weapons, these are instruments of misfortune, things dislike them indeed, that is why one who is in line with the Dao (有道者) does not involve himself with them....
>
> Weapons are instruments of misfortune, they are not the instruments of the exemplary person, who will use them only if there is no other way, [because] to be tranquil and indifferent is the highest. Being victorious is not something pleasant, taking pleasure in it amounts to enjoy killing people.

This chapter expresses Laozi's anti-war thinking. Here "one who is in line with the Dao" indicates someone who has cultivated themselves to a very high level. This type of person has a very thoroughly humanitarianist thinking, and deeply understands the brutality of war, and hates war. When forced to resist tyranny they will take up arms, but their heart-mind will hold vast to the virtue (德) of being "tranquil and indifferent."

Chapter 32:

> The Dao is perpetually nameless and plain and simple. Although subtle and imperceptible, no one in the human realm can subordinate it. [...]
>
> As there is mutual merging (of *yin qi* and *yang qi*) between heaven and earth, sweet dew descends moistening all equally, absent any human incitement.
>
> As the ten thousand things arise, all sorts of names are produced; once those names have been determined, one knows that there are limits, and by knowing one is limited, one can avoid danger.
>
> The Dao's existence in the human realm is akin to rivers and oceans into which smaller streams flow.

"The Dao is perpetually nameless and plain and simple" ("the Dao" is forever without name and in a pure and simple state), this "Dao" indicates a metaphysical nameless, shapeless/formless, root beginning existential "Dao."

"The Dao's existence in the human realm is akin to rivers and oceans into which smaller streams flow" means that "the Dao" is the returning point that all things can depend on, just as the great rivers, lakes and oceans are to smaller rivers and streams [i.e. the great rivers lakes and oceans are also a dependable return point]. This "the Dao" is "the Dao" that is in the lowest position, being low is one of the most important ideas for Laozi, this is "the Dao"

that is involved in the human realm, not the metaphysical "Dao." The last two sentences are suspected of being erroneously placed here, they do not fit well with the rest of the chapter.

Chapter 34:

> The great Dao flows unboundedly, and it can be left and right. All things rely on it so as to be generated, and it [the great Dao] does not speak, and achieves without possessing (成果而不有). It covers and nourishes all things without being their ruler and owner.

This is "the Dao" that creates all things ("all things rely on it so as to be generated"), it is the existential "Dao."

Chapter 35:

> Gasping the great sign [i.e. the Dao], and heading toward the world. Heading toward with no harm, settled and unanxious (安), harmonious and peaceful.
>
> Music and food, those who go by will stop [for them]. When the Dao is expressed from the mouth, it is so bland that it has no flavor.

"The great sign" means the great "Dao." Here the flavorless Dao is the "non-action (无为)" "Dao." Laozi thinks that grasping and holding to reasonableness of "non-action," everyone can be settled and unanxious, harmonious and peaceful.

Chapter 37:

> The Dao is constantly non-action, and thereby nothing is not done.

Here "the Dao" is quite evidently "non-action" "Dao."

Chapter 38:

> Higher *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] is not virtuous (德), therefore is virtuous; lower virtue does not let go of virtue, therefore it is not virtuous.... Therefore, when the Dao is lost, there is virtue, when virtue is lost, there is humaneness.
>
> .... Those with foresight, the luxuriant of the Dao, and beginning of stupidity.[15]

15 Tr. note: This line is particularly difficult to render into a readable standalone line given Chen's own reading, and the context here. See Chapter 38.

This chapter discusses "*de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]" Laozi thinks that not acting recklessly, and not purposively expressing one's actions ("not acting and thereby not going by actions") can be called "higher virtuosity (德)." If one does not act recklessly, but purposively expresses their actions ("not acting but going by actions") then they are "lower virtuosity (德)." Those of "higher virtuosity" go by self-so, embody the Dao and thereby act. If one expresses "conscious assertive action (有为)" (recklessly doing what they want), then "the Dao" is lost. Losing the Dao is a consequence of "conscious assertive action." The "Dao" that is lost is the "self-so, non-action (自然无为)" Dao. "The Dao" of the "luxuriant of the Dao" continues what is said above with regards to the "self-so, non-action" Dao.

Chapter 40:

> Reversal is the movement of the Dao; weakening is the function of the Dao.

Here the regulatory patterns and function of the existential "Dao" are being discussed.

Chapter 41:

> Higher people hear the Dao, diligence and walk it; middle people hear the Dao, some preserved some lost; lower people hear the Dao, great laughter at it. [If they] did not laugh it would not be sufficient to be taken as the Dao.
>
> The bright Dao seems dark; the advancing Dao seems to retreat; the smooth, level] Dao seems rugged and uneven….
>
> The Dao is hidden without a name. Only the Dao is good at assisting and completing.

Here "the Dao" can be obtained and "heard," it is clear that it is not the metaphysical Dao. This "Dao" that can be heard is expressed like "dark," "retreating," "uneven," "like a valley," "dirty," "insufficient,"[16] and other characteristics. "The Dao" discussed here is that involved in the human realm. This "Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].

The last line of this chapter says: "The Dao is hidden without a name." This distant hidden shapeless and nameless "Dao" is clearly indicating the metaphysical indistinct "Dao." This "hidden" and "nameless" "Dao" cannot not, of

16 Tr. note: These last three characteristics are not included in what Chen quotes, but they are in Chapter 41.

course, be "heard." Clearly this "Dao" is different from the "Dao" in the earlier lines, which can be "heard." In many places Laozi used words without thinking about how they were used above.

Chapter 42:

> The Dao generates oneness, oneness generates twoness, twoness generates threeness, threeness generates all things.

This chapter describes the historical process of "the Dao" creating all things. This is clearly a discussion of the existential "Dao."

Chapter 46:

> When the world has the Dao, the riding horses (走马) are returned and used to apply manure [i.e. work on farms]. When the world does not have the Dao, army horses born on the outskirts.

Here "the world having the Dao" and "the world not having the Dao" refers to what we often talk about in terms of being "on course" or not. If governing can be "self-so, non-action (自然无为)" then the state government can be "on course" ("the world has the Dao"), but if there is too much "conscious assertive action (有为)" then the state government will be off course ("the world without the Dao").

Chapter 47:

> Not looking out the window, seeing the Dao of heaven (天道).

"The Dao of heaven" indicates natural or self-so (自然) regulatory patterns. This "Dao" indicates "the Dao" of regulatory patterns.

Chapter 48:

> For learning daily increasing, for the Dao daily decreasing. Deceasing and decreasing, to the point of non-action.

This "Dao" is "the Dao" of non-action.

Chapter 51:

> The Dao generates them, virtuosity (德) nourishes them, things give shape to them, and the environment to bring them to completion.
>
> This is why none of the ten thousand things do not revere the Dao and value virtuosity.

> The Dao is revered as such, and virtuosity is valued as such, as [they] command nothing and always are self-so (自然).
>
> Therefore the Dao generates them, virtuosity (德) nourishes them; lets them grow and feeds them; makes them complete and mature, nurtures them and shields them.

Here "the Dao" is discussed in terms of its creative generation, fostering and cultivating of all things. All instances of "the Dao" in this chapter indicate the metaphysically existential "Dao." When this metaphysically existential "Dao" has generated and completed things, it begins to become implemented as the *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] that completes things.

Chapter 52:

> If I have a little knowledge, walking on the great Dao [is my aim], only getting off the Dao I fear.
>
> The great Dao is very even, but there are some people who like to take crooked paths. The court is very corrupt, the fields are overgrown with weeds, the granaries stand empty; the clothes are refined and colorful, sharp swords are carried on the belt, are bored with fine drink and food, riches and goods are plentiful; this is called *dao* 盗 [to steal, robber]. Such is not the Dao!

Here "the great Dao" shares the same meaning with phrases we commonly use such as "being on the right path." What does it mean to "be on the right path?" Laozi thinks that the ruler, in both his public and private life, should be clear and pure, tranquil, and follow non-action, and that this is "being on the right path." "Not the Dao" means not following the "right path" and is not clear and pure, tranquil, or following non-action.

Chapter 55:

> The heart-mind deploying the *qi* is called to force (强). If a thing is strong (状), it is old—this is called not [going along] the Dao. Not [going along] the Dao [results in] ending early.

Here "not [going along] the Dao" simply means showing off. Laozi is hinting at the soft and harmonious "Dao." The lines we have are the last lines ("If a thing is strong, it is old—this is called not [going along] the Dao. Not [going along] the Dao [results in] ending early.") already in Chapter 30, they might be repeated here as a mistake, but we can't know.

Chapter 59:

> it is the Dao of long life and lastingly seen.

This means to say that lastingly maintained reasonableness (道理) ("lastingly seen" means "lastingly established"). Here "the Dao" is what we call reasonable or method, it's not a special philosophical term for Laozi here.

Chapter 60:

> Ordering a great state is like cooking a small fish. Manage everything of the world according to the Dao.

Ordering a state is like frying a small fish, one should use "non-action" and not conscious assertive action. "Manage everything of the world according to the Dao" means employing "non-action" in governing the world (and on this level "the Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]).

Chapter 62:

> The Dao is the protector of all things…. for establishing the son of Heaven, appointing the three highest minister-officials, even the presence of jade disc before four horses,[17] cannot compare with sitting and performing the Dao.
>
> Why did the ancients treasure the Dao? Isn't it to say: what is sought can be obtained and felons can expiate their crimes? This is why it is the most precious of this world.

In this chapter "the Dao" is always the "self-so, non-action (自然无为)" "Dao." Laozi thinks that "establishing the son of Heaven, appointing the three highest minister-officials, even the presence of jade disc before four horses" are ritual instances of not employing "self-so, non-action." If the ruler is able to employ the "Dao" of "self-so, non-action" then the people can all achieve rest [i.e. be settled and unanxious] (this is what is meant by "The Dao is the protector of all things.").

17 Tr. note: This is a description of the ceremony for establishing the son of Heaven and high-level minister-officials.

Chapter 65:

> Those of the past able to practice the Dao, did not use it to enlighten the people, but they used it to make them *yu* 愚 [unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid].

The "Dao" of "being able to practice the Dao" indicates the pure and *yu* 愚 [unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid] "Dao." Wang Bi writes "*Yu* 愚 [unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid]' speaks to not knowing and preserving genuineness allowing one to follow *ziran* 自然 [nature, self-so]." Here "*yu* 愚 [unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid]" has a special meaning for Laozi, it means being pure, unadulterated, simple, and honest (here "the Dao" is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]).

Chapter 67:

> [The entire world is telling me, "The Dao is great but seems to be inferior. It is only because of its greatness that it appears inferior. If it were inferior, it would have been minute for a long time now!"]
>
> I have three treasures to guard and protect. The first is called loving-kindness, the second is called frugality, the third is called not daring to be ahead of the world.
>
> Loving-kindness thus to be able to be brave (慈故能勇) (3); frugality thus be able to be broad (俭故能广); not daring to be ahead of the world thus be able to become *Qi zhang* 器长 [utensil chief].
>
> Now, abandoning loving-kindness and being courageous, abandoning frugality and being broad; abandoning to step back and being ahead: this means death!

This chapter discusses "loving-kindness." There is not much resonance between the lines: "The entire world is telling me, 'The Dao is great but seems to be inferior.... If it were inferior, it would have been minute for a long time now!'" and the parts about "loving-kindness." It is clearly an error in copying, where some parts that belong to another chapter(s) were erroneously put here. But there is no way of telling which other chapter(s) these lines belong to. If we say there is a mistake here we can follow Yan Lingfeng's idea that they belong to Chapter 34, and that the meaning of "The Dao is great seems to be inferior" means that "'the Dao' is vast and great, unlike any concrete thing." If this is true then "the Dao" here is the metaphysically existential "Dao." But if these lines were not erroneously placed here, then "the Dao" here should be what is

called in the later part "three treasures" indicating "loving-kindness," "frugality," "abandoning to step back and being ahead."

Chapter 73:

> The Dao of heaven (天之道), no conflict and yet good success, no words and yet good response.

"The Dao of heaven (天之道)" indicates natural or self-so (自然) regulatory patterns. This "Dao" is "the Dao" of regulatory patterns.

Chapter 77:

> The Dao of heaven (天之道)[18] it resembles stretching of a bow? High, it suppresses, low it raises. When it is surplus, it reduces, when it is not enough, it compensates.
>
> The Dao of heaven (天之道), reduce what excesses, and compensate what is not enough. The Dao of humans (人之道),[19] is not like this, reducing [that which is, those which have] not enough in order to enrich [that which, those who] have surplus.

Laozi thinks that natural self-so (自然) regulatory patterns is decreasing but having surplus, it can be used to compensate for that which is insufficient. But society's normal regulatory patterns ("the Dao of humans/way of humans") are not like this, instead they take from those who do not have enough, and enrich those with surplus. "Those who possess the Dao (有道者)" indicates those who are in line with natural self-so regulatory patterns.[20] This type of person can take surplus and contribute it to those in society who do not have enough. In this chapter "the Dao" indicates "the Dao" of natural self-so (自然) regulatory patterns.

Chapter 79:

> The Dao of heaven has no kin.

This means that natural self-so (自然) regulatory patterns do not have favorites. In this chapter "the Dao" indicates "the Dao" of natural self-so (自然) regulatory patterns.

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18 Tr. note: This can also be translated as "way of Heaven" or "way of heaven" depending on context.

19 Tr. note: This can also be translated as "way of man" depending on context.

20 Tr. note: It is for this reason that we translate 有道者 as "those in line with the Dao" or "those aligned with the Dao."

Chapter 81:

> The Dao of heaven brings benefit without harming; the Dao of human beings acts without contending.

"The Dao" in this chapter is, like in 77 and 79, "the Dao" of natural self-so (自然) regulatory patterns and laws.

According to the various chapters above, finding the actual connotations of "the Dao" we can be sure that in chapters 1, 4, 21, 25, 32, 34, 42, 51, and others "the Dao" is the metaphysically existential "Dao." In many others "the Dao" is discussed in terms of aspects relating to human life. Laozi's philosophical metaphysics is colorful and certainly thick and deep, but he is most concerned with problems relating to human live and politics—and we can be sure of this based on evidence from where most of the entire *Laozi* places emphasis.

If the metaphysical "Dao" was not connected to human life, then it would just be an empty concept, and that's it. When "the Dao" is implemented in the world of experience, then, and only then, does it have significance for humans. On this level "the Dao"—as an index of human life—then comes to have the characteristics of "self-so, non-action (自然无为)," "emptiness and tranquility (虚静)," "softness and weakness (柔弱)." These characteristics are all based on reflecting on the needs of human life and politics.

3 Self-So and Non-Action, Emptiness and Tranquility, Softness and Weakness

3.1 *Self-So and Non-Action*

"Self-so" and "non-action" taken together form one of the most important concepts of Laozi's philosophy. Laozi believes all things should develop in accordance with their own particular conditions, selves, and fundamental states (of being), and should not be restricted by external intention or will. Things each possess their own tendencies and potentialities, and these do not need to be appended with anything external to them. This is the basis for Laozi's advocacy of "self-so" (自然)—an ideal state of self-actualization that occurs through the free unfolding of one's own tendencies without even the slightest external coercion.[21]

The concept of non-action (无为) similarly refers to following one's self-so nature (自然) without any artificial interference. The idea of artifice (人为)

21 Tr. note: *Ziran* 自然 can also be translated as "natural" or "nature"

here includes any excessive, unnecessary human action, particularly any coercive or profligate behavior.

Laozi's philosophy has also been called a philosophy of "nature (自然)," which is the same word in Chinese as "self-so (自然)." This claim finds basis in Chapter 25, which reads:

> People model earth,
> The earth models heaven,
> Heaven models the Dao,
> And the Dao follows "nature (自然)."

In this sequence, it is not the Dao alone that follows "nature"; all things—the action of heaven, earth, and ideally humans, as well—take "nature" as a model. However, reading "nature" here is an inaccurate interpretation of the term *ziran* (自然), which is better read as "follows itself" or "self-so." Thus, when Laozi says that the Dao is "*ziran* (自然)" he actually means the Dao follows itself and bases its action on its own conditions. Its internal factors determine its own existence and activity, and it has no need to rely on other external factors. This being the case, understanding *ziran* (自然) as the natural world in this sentence is wrong [though many have taken it this way]; *ziran* (自然) is not a noun meaning "nature," and should be read as "self-so." That is to say, the "nature" Laozi proposes as a model of action for the Dao and all things does not refer to the external model of the natural world, but rather to how a thing naturally is. It describes the Dao following itself.

In fact, the term often read as "nature (自然)" actually always connotes "self-so (自然)" in the *Laozi*. Thus, people would more accurately refer to Laozi's thought as a philosophy of "self-so" than one of "nature." Passages in Chapters 17, 23, 51 and 64, all use this term in ways that cannot be understood as referring to the natural world, but rather indicate things following their own intrinsic dispositions without interference by external coercive forces. This shows clearly the importance of the concept of "self-so" in the *Laozi*.

In Chapter 17 Laozi writes, "How rare when words are valuable. When success is accomplished and things succeed, the common people all say: 'We are *ziran* 自然 [natural, self-so, spontaneous]'." They say this because accomplishment came about without awareness of any political power. This chapter tells us clearly that the best policies of government do not interfere with the behavior of the people. Rather, the duties of government lie in facilitating the success of the people in their own achievements. Thus the government made itself responsible for supporting the people, not controlling or disturbing them, and

people believed their achievements were due to their own personal development. Here, Laozi is arguing that when people remain unaware of government intervention they become free and happy, and society is well ordered.

In Chapter 23 we find, "Sparse words is self-so (自然). That is why [violently] blowing wind does not last the morning, why sudden [heavy] rain does not last all day." Here, "sparse words" means not excessively instructing or commanding people. Speaking little is an ideal for rulers and officials, and is related to Laozi's proposition that one can practice "teaching that has no speech." (Chapters 2 and 43) Chapter 17 has already told us that the more the government interferes with people's lives, the worse things become, because people are no longer acting in accord with their own particular tendencies and situations (self-so). Correspondingly, if government decrees are onerous on the people, then, like "violent wind" and "heavy rain," ruling power will be short lived.

Likewise, it is precisely because the Dao and *de* do not intrude in people's lives that everyone praises them. Chapter 51 quite clearly explains that the admiration accorded to the Dao and cherishing of *de* arise from their non-interference with the self-so activity of the myriad things. That is, all things in the world honor the Dao and *de*, and they do so not by decree by rather of their own accord—that is, naturally self-so. This chapter's advocacy of not commanding things but rather continuously allowing for them to be self-so connects with Chapter 64's promotion of facilitating the myriad things in being self-so and not daring to act assertively.

Here Laozi finally relates this idea to sages. "This is why the sages desire to have no desires, do not value things that are difficult to obtain; they *xue* 学 [study, model, imitate] not *xue* 学 [study, model, imitate] and return to what the common people have missed, help to bring about the self-so[ness] of all things and not hazarding to act on them." (Chapter 64) Like officials who are supposed to be passive, the sage simply allows things to act according to their natural tendencies. This is also the same way the Dao "helps" things—by not interfering. Following their own courses, everything acts "naturally," in line with their own individual natures rather than some larger "nature" that is somehow other or separate. These passages make it clear that the Dao's relationship with the myriad things is one of facilitation and enablement, merely developing in conformance with the natural conditions of things. The "sage" who embodies the Dao and is the ideal ruler governs in precisely this spirit, enabling the natural self-development of the people rather than restricting it.

According to these passages, Laozi's concept of "self-so" aims to dispel the influence of outside agents, the interference of which is seen as harmful for individual things and their development. It promotes the idea that the behavior

of all things ought to accord with their own inherent tendencies and potentialities, free of the obstruction of external forces and interference of external volition. Importantly, Chapter 5 of the *Laozi* declares:

> Heaven and earth are not humane,
> They take the ten thousand things as straw dogs;
> The sage is not humane,
> [they] take the hundred clans as straw dogs.

"Straw dogs" were ornaments praised during ceremonies, and thereafter crushed. This passage tells us the natural world holds no biases. Rather, "heaven and earth" allow the myriad things to be generated and develop naturally and self-so (自然生长). It allows things to promote themselves. The sage is similarly impartial and acts in the same manner, respecting the way the world works and allowing the people to develop of themselves and flourish self-so. This is done through adopting "non-action," which is how humans model the behavior of the Dao. In other words, the term "self-so" applies generally to the natural courses of phenomena in the world, consistently describing the nature of the activity of heaven and earth (the natural world). "Non-action" refers to a manner of human conduct and can be said to align with things being "self-so." The two notions of "self-so" and "non-action" can be said to be dual aspects of a single idea.

We find textual evidence for this claim in Chapter 37, which reads, "The Dao is constantly non-action, and thereby nothing is not done." The Dao moves in accordance with the intrinsic qualities of each thing, and Laozi thereby describes its metaphysical interaction with the world of experience as "non-action" that aligns with things being "self-so." He thus moves these conceptions from the metaphysical realm onto a political level. This is, however, the only time Laozi uses "non-action" to discuss the Dao; all other discussions of "non-action" in the *Laozi* are political in their orientation. The term is typically used to denounce those who think that "conscious assertive action" (有为) is necessary for ruling.[22]

So-called "assertive action" is how rulers exercise their own personal interests or desires. Laozi thinks that this type of selfishness is responsible for many

22 Hu Shi 胡适, in his *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Shi* 中国古代哲学史 [*History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy*], says that Laozi is opposed to "assertive action" in politics mainly as a reaction to the corrupt governments of his day. "All advocacy of non-action in political philosophy," he states, "is in reaction to overbearing government policies."

social problems, and the motivation for his advocacy of "non-action" arises from the need to reign in the coercive or profligate behavior and wanton self-promotion that occur through rulers' "assertive action." Laozi has recognized that the damage caused by such governance in his time is already extremely serious. He thus writes:

> The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world, the more impoverished the people will become; [...]
>
> the more conspicuous laws and decrees become, the more bandits and robbers there will be. (Chapter 57)

> The people starve, because their superiors eat lots of tax, in this way [the people] starve.
>
> The people are hard to govern, because their superiors act assertively (有为), in this way [the people are] difficult to govern. (Chapter 75)

Excessive prohibitions leave the people at a loss what to do, and overly strict laws create hardship for the people. Harsh punishment and abuse, as well as heavy taxes feeding greed, bring destitution upon the people.

Laozi saw the widespread hardship caused by heavy taxation first hand. Governments in which the rulers live greedily through taxation increases only the benefit of a select few, which thereby becomes a form of cruel despotism on the masses. As the government centralized power, turning authoritarian, the lives of common people became increasingly unstable. In Laozi's time, the tyrannical stripping of the people's rights was commonplace. Increasing concentration of political authority led to greater trampling and ravaging of ordinary people. The government that should have served the people became, instead, oppressive. Laozi expounds,

> The court is in a state of sheer corruption. As a result, the fields are barren as stretches of wasteland and the granaries are completely empty. Still they dress themselves in splendid attire, they wear sharp and fine swords, they are satiated with exquisite food and drink, and have plundered the plentiful goods. These people are called the chiefs of all robbers. How far this is from the Dao! (Chapter 53)

These few phrases express fully the social and political circumstances of autocracy and extravagant waste under which the *Laozi* was authored. Rulers infringed on the public to fatten their own courts. They led lives of luxury while

those working the fields were left to desolation and starvation. The Dao wants nothing to do with luxury or showing off. Faced with such a situation, how could Laozi not lament "How far this is from the Dao!" When rulers harm the people, and bolster their own desires to live in extravagance, the people's fields turn to dust and the granaries empty. Yet with those in power with sharp swords at their side, brazenly asserting their superiority and ability to suppress, who among the starving and dying masses would risk expressing grievance or protest? Laozi recognized this situation clearly, and it is no wonder that he angrily condemned those responsible to be "robbers."

When such oppression is so excessive and goes on unrectified, Laozi predicts that it is bound to produce broader calamity that affects even the well off. He writes, "When the people do not fear their ruler's authority and power, then a great calamity will occur." (Chapter 72) Such concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the rulers, along with its use to oppress ordinary people, brings society to an extreme. From this extreme of suppression things will begin to reverse, giving rise to counteractive movement. Laozi goes on to state, "[If] the people do not fear death, why and how can death be taken to [make] them afraid?" (Chapter 74) If the people are forced to such extreme circumstances, their desperation leaves them only with willingness to face peril. When continually mistreated, they will come to care little for their own lives, at which point even the use of execution as a threat is unable to control them.

These arguments are the result of Laozi's reflections on the politics of his day. Living in such times, Laozi felt deeply that the source of people's inequality and cruelty lay in assumptions of the ability to judge others and actions of those who felt licensed to impose their personal ideals on others. He saw that the persistent reckless and selfish acts of rulers of his time were sufficient to result in great catastrophe. It is against this background that Laozi came to advocate non-action, which he saw as the only possible solution. His vehemently appeal for non-action in governance was, in his view, the only fundamental way to redress this situation. We can even say that developing a theory of non-action was the principal aim and motivation of the writing and teachings of the *Laozi*. It even shaped the foundation of his metaphysics, which is developed to reinforce and promote this philosophy of non-action.

While advocacy of non-action permeates the entirety of the text, Chapter 57 provides a particularly clear statement of the effectiveness of non-action:

> I do not act,
> and the people transform themselves (自化);
> I delight in stillness,

and the people rectify themselves;
I do not undertake anything,
and the people thrive by themselves;
I am without desires,
and the people make themselves simple.

Here "delighting in stillness (好静)," "not undertaking anything (无事)," and "without desires (无欲)" are all descriptions of non-action. "Delighting in stillness" is directed at rulers and officials who cause clamor and disrupt things through their own disturbance and unrest. "Not undertaking anything" critiques those who are strict and cruel in creating or carrying out policies, and thereby aims to discourage political action that creates hardship for the people. The biggest problem, that of selfishness, he opposes with the admonition to be "without desires," which means to reign in the ruler's desire for expansion.

We can thus see that all of these are all included under the fold of "non-action." Successful governance through non-action, moreover, results in the automatic self-cultivation, self-development, and self-actualization of the people. In this way the people can naturally prosper peacefully, and society becomes naturally harmonious. If the government embodies these principles and acts non-assertively, then the people develop naturally self-so into a stable, peaceful, and rich society.

Advocating non-action produces a type of thinking rooted in the ideal of non-interference that values complete liberty and a hands-off approach to governance. This attitude thus affords the world a great amount of freedom. Laozi believes that the self-inflation of the ruling class is sufficient to threaten the freedom and well-being of the common people. Selfish rulers and officials act precisely opposite this ideal, putting their hands in everything and thereby negatively affecting people's lives by stripping them of their liberty and security. Promoting non-action is an attempt to dispel this problem. He therefore puts forth the concept of non-action so as to reduce rulers' coercion and interference. Although Laozi is not building a democratic society, his political ideal is nevertheless steeped in the hope, desire, and necessity of freedom.

Laozi's concept of non-action by no means advocates "doing nothing." Rather, it means acting appropriately and effectively, and denounces only rash and excessive action. People have often misunderstood Laozi's notion of non-action, which reads literally "non-action (无为)." Especially common is misreading of the idea that by taking non-action there is nothing one cannot do, which is derived from the line "The Dao is constantly non-action, and thereby nothing is not done." (Chapter 37). Many have misinterpreted Laozi's

meaning here as suggesting one hide one's action and work in secret, and to be thereby teaching people to present an appearance of "doing nothing" so as to reap benefits unbeknownst to others. This makes Laozi out as some sort of schemer, which is an entirely inaccurate reading. Laozi is no such advocate of furtive and manipulative intrigue.[23]

Properly understood, nowhere in the text do we find Laozi endorsing such behavior. This misinterpretation is based on an overall misunderstanding of Laozi's thought that fails to grasp the specific implications of Laozi's unique philosophic vocabulary. A correct reading of the line "The Dao is constantly non-action, and thereby nothing is not done" shows it to actually mean that as long as one acts appropriately, anything can be accomplished. One thereby recognizes the true nature of this statement as teaching us that avoidance of rash and excessive action allows one to succeed in any given task. Non-action is by no means furtive, but rather a comprehensive approach one adopts to effective action that includes outlook, attitude, and method. Laozi wants people to act with the right attitude and in the right way.

Through the concept of non-action, Laozi thus advocates a specific approach to engaging with the world that claims to be ultimately the most efficacious. We should thus understand Laozi's assertion that by adopting an attitude of non-action "nothing is not done (无不为)" as referring to the effectiveness produced by non-action and its avoidance of rashness and excess. This understanding accords with Chapter 3's assertions, "I act non-action (为无为) and there is nothing I am unable to govern." The phrase here "to act non-action" reads literally, "to enact (为) non-action (无为)." However, it in fact refers to adopting an approach of "non-action (无为)" in carrying out one's actions (为). Thus, a line that reads literally "enacting non-action leaves nothing ungoverned" ought to be understood as teaching us that utmost effectiveness is achieved through adopting an approach of non-action in managing social and political affairs. This shows that Laozi certainly does not oppose people working hard and striving toward their goals. He still wants people to take action.

Laozi thus praises the Dao as "acting but not relying [on things]" (Chapter 2). He even closes the *Laozi* by advocating "acting without contending [against the situation]" (Chapter 81), which he identifies as characteristic of the sage. Laozi encourages people to act. He promotes active engagement with the world and enactment of subjective agency in ways that allow for the natural development

23 This misunderstanding is extremely common. In *Zhuang-Lao Tong Bian* 庄老通辨, for example, Qian Mu 钱穆 repeatedly claims Laozi to be a deceptive schemer. Such interpretations entirely distort this aspect of Laozi's thought.

of the things of the world, including other humans. At the same time he also discourages people from trying to control things or contend for possession of things, as well as from extending such desire for personal possession to the fruits of one's efforts. He thus motivates people to action and even to help themselves, only not by means of being controlling, relying too heavily on others, coercion, or creating conflict. One should not act selfishly or greedily.

These notions show the subtlety of the philosophy Laozi developed, which advocated allowing each person to develop their natural endowments according to their own needs. This basis underlies the specific conceptualization of "self-so" presented in the *Laozi*. In accordance with this advocacy of "self-so" behavior and development, Laozi further puts forth his conception of "non-action," which aims to allow for people's various different aspirations to achieve harmonious balance. The application of the teachings of self-so and non-action in the political realm aims to afford the common people the greatest possible amount of liberty, as well as to allow for the development of particularity and diversity. That is to say, these concepts aim to allow for the full development of individual character and individual aspirations, restricted only against extending these aspirations to the point of infringement on the realm of the activity of others. Especially for the ruler, the concept of non-action aims to remove tyrannical intentions and actions so as to hinder the coercion and appropriation of the common people's rights.

We thus recognize Laozi's advocacy of self-so and non-action from his historical background. In the relatively tranquil and self-subsistent life of ancient society, the government did not necessarily directly impact most people's day-to-day existence. We find this in the lyrics of the ancient song:

> Busy when the sun arises,
> Resting when the sun sets,
> What has imperial power to do with me? (*Ji Rang Ge* 击壤歌)

Enlightenment thought in the West gave rise to the notion that "the laziest government is the best government." Governments at that time had little in the way of truly crucial social functions. Their main role consisted in things like repairing roads. However, today this situation is greatly changed. Governments must coordinate the management of an incredible variety of issues. The possibility of governing in a manner of "non-action" has already disappeared. Nevertheless, in terms of reducing the damage caused by autocratic governance, the concept of non-action remains highly valuable. Today, the trend toward controlled homogeny in people's lives is increasingly intense. This

has already become a worrisome phenomenon throughout the world. We see everywhere the dominance of people's lives by political power, everywhere circumstances of human helplessness. Political power continues to become increasingly strong and increasingly centralized. In such times as ours, Laozi's advocacy of self-so and non-action remain especially relevant.

3.2 *Emptiness and Tranquility*

Laozi writes, "Arrive at the ultimate emptiness, preserve unmatchable tranquility." (Chapter 16) He sees the state of emptiness and tranquility as the source and foundation of the myriad things. Faced with a chaotic world full of disputes and war, he wants to promote these ideals as alternative models for human action and affairs. Laozi thus put forth this position in hopes that people would strive for "emptiness" and "tranquility" in their dealings and undertakings. Below I explicate Laozi's concepts of emptiness and tranquility respectively.

Sima Tan 司马谈 (d. 110 BCE), in his *Lun Liu Jia Yaozhi* 论六家要旨 [*Discussion of the Fundamentals of the Six Schools*], argues that Daoist thought is based on the concept of emptiness. He specifically states that Daoist thought "takes emptiness and non-presence (无) as the root." Laozi himself states clearly that emptiness is a quality characteristic of the Dao, and we thus see that the concept of "emptiness" is central to Laozian thought. As Chapter 4 states,

> The Dao is empty, but use it and it might not never fill up, full.
> So abysmal!
> Like the ancestor of the ten thousand things.

That "The Dao is empty" describes the character of the metaphysical Dao. This "empty" metaphysical Dao is the source and foundation of the myriad things. Moreover, in addition to being the root of things of this world, the functioning of its activity is eternally inexhaustible, making it an endless source that generates phenomena and assists their development. This shows us clearly that Laozi's understanding of "emptiness" is certainly not simply nothingness. Chapter 5 gives a metaphor that helps us understand how such an inexhaustible and generative emptiness might be understood:

> The space between heaven and earth—
> does it not resemble a bellows?
> Empty but inexhaustible, once it is in motion,
> there is ceaseless generation (生生不息).

The metaphor of "bellows" symbolizes the state of Laozian "emptiness," which can function endlessly, the functional but empty state. The space between the heavens and earth is empty, but its use is endless. As soon as movement begins, empty space becomes invaluable, essential to creative activity of the myriad things. Moreover, because it is empty, it can never be used up. We thus see that this "emptiness" provides the limitless basis of the creative activity by which the myriad things pour into existence. Think of a mountain valley. Contrasted with the hills or mountains that surround it, it is quite "empty"; yet this is where water flows and life flourishes. Laozi enjoyed using valleys as a metaphor for "emptiness," and specifically uses the image "The higher virtuosity (德) seems like a valley" (Chapter 41) to describe the mental state of someone exceptional. In fact, the phrase "empty oneself like a valley (虚怀若谷)" is common in Chinese to describe a psychological state of non-egotism. This phrase literally characterizes one's mind and feelings as empty, broad, and open like a valley. Those able to achieve this state of mind can be considered, according to Chapter 41, people of higher virtue/virtuosity.

When the concept of emptiness is applied in the realm of human life it implies aspects of "hiding valuable things deeply (深藏)." The biography of Laozi given in the *Shi ji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] states, "The good merchant deeply hides precious goods so as to seem like emptiness; the exemplary gentleman (君子) is full of virtue but outwardly appears ignorant." Here, "deeply hiding precious goods so as to seem like emptiness" forms a nice contrast with practices that present goods as consisting of more than their actual amount.

Laozi's "valley" of "emptiness" can be contrasted with its opposite aspects of substantiality (实) and fullness (盛). "Substantiality" implies the presence of formed views or judgments, and fullness indicates pride and complacency (as in "being full of one's self"). Such fullness is exactly what leads to corruption. "Those who make themselves appear remain dim, those who consider themselves as right do not shine forth, those who are conceited accomplish nothing, those who boast of themselves cannot endure." (Chapter 24) This reminds people not to think too highly of themselves. Laozi speaks many times about the maladies produced by pride as well as the complacency that accompanies arrogance regarding one's own achievements.

Things characterized by emptiness, like people who are not full of themselves, also necessarily express the quality of tranquility. Laozi places great emphasis on emptiness, and thus must also stress tranquility. In both people's personal lives and public affairs, Laozi sees tranquility as having an especially important function. Let us now look at the ways in which Laozi discusses the concept of tranquility:

> The ten thousand things arise in unison,
> I observe how they return.
> All things are numerous,
> each of them returning to their roots.
> Returning to the root is called tranquility,
> tranquility is called returning to destiny. (Chapter 16)

Things grow, and Laozi notices that they follow a cyclical pattern as they develop. That is, there are many different states of being, yet it is the final state of tranquility that all things eventually return to—and where they began, as well. Laozi wants people to be aware of this natural phenomenon so that they may reflect it in society and politics.

> Those who make themselves appear remain dim,
> those who consider themselves as right do not shine forth,
> those who are conceited accomplish nothing,
> those who boast of themselves cannot endure. (Chapter 24)

> Holding and filling it is not as good as finishing;
> To beat it and sharpen it, it cannot preserve anything for long.
> A hall filled to the brim with gold and jade, there is none who can guard it.
> When wealth and honor lead to arrogance, one invites disaster upon oneself. (Chapter 9)

These passages mind us to be wary of pride, and to instead deeply hide things of true value.

Laozi is especially interested in having rulers and officials make use of tranquility in their lives and policies. He tells us, "Tranquil and calm, to align (正) all under heaven." (Chapter 45) The effect of purity and tranquility could not be greater. He approaches this from multiple angles, also telling us, "Without desires it is tranquil, everything in the world will self-correct (自正)." (Chapter 37) If one is not bothered by intense desires, they can reach a pure and quiet state. As quoted above, Laozi would have rulers recite the lines, "I delight in tranquility, and the self *zheng* 正 [upright, correct, align, rectify]; I do not undertake anything, and the people self thrive; I am without desires, and the people self-simplify." (Chapter 57)

Clearly, being free of desires relates closely to purity and tranquility. Above we saw that acting non-assertively allows people to become simple and set themselves right. Saying that "I am free of desires, and the people will become simple themselves" is another way of showing that desires oppose simplicity.

Laozi, however, is not talking about all desires; he is attacking devious, bad desires, not basic human desires or needs. If only rulers and officials were able to control their superfluous desires, then society could become stable and safe.

The opposite of "tranquility" is being upset, anxious, or annoyed. Laozi puts it this way:

> Heaviness is the root of lightness, stillness is the ruler of rashness.
>
> This is why the exemplary person travels all day without leaving his wagon is heavy. Although they have glory, resides in joyful leisure, and remains detached. So how can a lord of ten thousand chariots make light of himself while governing the world?
>
> In lightness then the root is lost, in rashness sovereignty is forfeited. (Chapter 26)

Tranquility and "heaviness," or solemnity, are related to one another. Keeping the one means preserving the other, so Laozi praises both. He thinks that a ruler, in his daily life, must be mindful of tranquility and heaviness. Even if a ruler can live a luxurious and pleasurable life, in order to be calm and still, tranquility and heaviness are required. Anxious and excited behavior on the ruler's part is often abusive and dangerous for the people. Laozi decries this when he writes, "Ordering a large state is like cooking a small fish." (Chapter 60) When frying a small fish, one should be careful not to turn it over too much, or else it will fall apart. Controlling a state similarly requires rulers to keep things pure and simple, and not institute heavy punishments or complicated laws.

Laozi's conception of tranquility has a specific background. Firstly, Laozi saw the rulers of his time acting without restraint, chasing bodily pleasures. He warns "The five colors blind the eyes; the five tones deafen the ears; the fives tastes damage the mouth. Hunting frantically serves [only] to make the human heart-mind crazy." (Chapter 12) In other words, reigning in one's desires and the excessive distraction they lead to is necessary to experience the world with clarity. Secondly, Laozi attacks the way he saw rulers abuse their people, especially through heavy taxation and brutal punishments. Only calm and pure leadership allows the people to feel secure, which is a requisite for the securing of political stability.

These arguments furthermore operate on an additional personal level. Laozi wants each individual to strive to become pure and calm. One should be able to remain clear even when busy, and compose oneself when anxious. Being "still" does not mean not moving, but rather preserving mental and emotional clarity while moving. Not dissimilar to the dynamic of non-action, we should remember that for Laozi there is movement in tranquility and tranquility in movement.

3.3 *Softness and Not Contending*[24]

Reversing more common ideas of power, Laozi writes, "Weakness is the function of the Dao," (Chapter 40) and, "[The Dao] exists continuously as though existent. Use it, it is inexhaustible." (Chapter 6) Laozi describes the Dao's method of generation as soft and weak, yet nevertheless continuous and unending. The Dao's use of weakness can be understood as analogous to non-action. Precisely because of the delicacy with which the Dao performs, things don't seem created by an external force, but rather born of themselves.

In the human realm, weakness is also beneficial. Laozi claims, "The soft and weak overcome the hard and strong." (Chapter 36) Laozi finds evidence for this throughout the natural world:

> Human life is soft and weak, human death is stiff and firm.
> Grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp, dead they are dry and withered.
> Thus, the firm and strong are in the category of death the soft and weak are in the category of life.
> In this way, soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut.
> The strong and big belong below, the soft and weak belong above. (Chapter 76)

In the world of experience, things that are hard and strong are often dead, whereas living things are generally soft and weak. Laozi uses human beings as an example. The human body is soft and weak when alive, but just few hours after death a body becomes stiff and inflexible. Grass and trees are the same, as are most other things in the world. This is why Laozi concludes that it is preferable to promote the soft and weak.

Additionally, strength and sturdiness even seem to invite disaster. Tall trees attract lumberjacks and are more likely to be toppled by a strong storm, whereas smaller trees, grass and weeds, being soft and weak, both fail to entice their own death and simply sway with the wind. Moreover, water, which Laozi considers "the softest" of things, can quite simply never be cut or damaged. Laozi thereby takes water as a central image in his writings:

> Nothing in the world is more gentle and weak than water, but nothing cannot surpass it in overcoming what is solid and strong, because there is nothing that can change it.

24 Tr. note: 不争 will also be translated as "not struggling." 争 can refer to either struggling or contending, so it will be translated according to context.

> Weakness overcomes strength and gentleness overcomes solidity, this is known by everyone in the world, yet no one is able to practice it. (Chapter 78)

Laozi also argues, "The softest things in the world can steer the hardest things in the world." (Chapter 43). In other words, water is the softest thing in the world, and proves astoundingly effective in attacking strong and hard things. Even small drops of water, if persistent, will eventually erode a rock. Floods can ruin a field and bring down the strongest pillars. The firm and study cannot stand up to water. Laozi sees water's exemplary "weakness" as providing it indomitability.

This point is directed against those who advocate the use of strength. These people are often selfish, pompous, full of themselves, and according to Laozi bring about most of the world's struggle and strife. This brings us to another pair of Laozi's major points: "not struggling" and "downward conduct." Not contending (为而不争, or simply 不争) focuses on the unobstructed efficacy of proper action, while downward conduct (处下) champions the power of the soft and weak and involves elements of modesty, prudence and broadmindedness.

Water is also central to the *Laozi* as an analogy for these points. In addition to being soft and weak, water also gathers in low places (that is, it conducts itself downward), does not struggle, and benefits the people. Laozi thinks that people should try to reflect these properties in their own lives. Downward conduct is a manner of being effective through softness and weakness, and connotes humility. Laozi often uses water analogies to express this point, describing how rivers not only flow downward but also eventually feed into lakes or oceans. He aims to show the advantages of such downward movement over people's all to common struggle to move upwards. To Laozi, the Dao is found in "rivers and oceans" (Chapter 32), and he believes that if more people came to appreciate downward movement then they would be less inclined to disagree and fight with one another. "Not struggling/contending" is based on this view.

In society, people constantly struggle with one another as they seek ways to benefit themselves. As an alternative to this, Laozi proposes the ideal of water as "good because it benefits the ten thousand things without engaging in contending" (Chapter 8), and the way of the sage as "acts without contending." (Chapter 81) He does not mean that people should give up fulfillment of their personal needs, or ignore society and become a hermit. Laozi advocates acting in ways that are beneficial to the surrounding world and people in it. The goal is to balance out social inequalities, which otherwise foster more conflict and struggle, through "not struggling"—that is, acting in a self-so manner that benefits all of humankind, not just oneself. This kind of benevolent action

champions the avoidance of conflict and strife over the achievement of success or fame, and is a lofty ethic not easily realized. When Laozi advocates not reveling in one's accomplishments, not claiming success, and withdrawing to the way of the heavens, he is talking about "not contending" (Chapters 2, 34, 9). It is all about lessening human conflict.

4 Summary and Criticism

Laozi's philosophical system starts with the Dao. He argues that it is the beginning of heaven and earth and the mother of all things; yet, all of this is outside experience. The Dao is not something that can be known through sensory perception; it is the pattern on which human life is modeled, and following it can solve human problems. Its actual existence can be neither proven nor denied. In this sense, we may liken the Dao to the political presupposition that "everyone is created equal." Are we all truly created equal? We cannot corroborate this foundational assumption's empirical veracity, nor can we fully disprove it. Laozi's Dao can be known from a "hypothetical viewpoint," but not an "existence"[25] one.

The development of Laozi's Dao can also be said to come from innate human feeling. Laozi wants to find something stable in a world of change—something beyond the individual—to enrich the human spirit and give people a connection to the cosmos.

Some scholars have argued that Laozi's metaphysical Dao is just an attempt at satisfying natural human interest in philosophical concepts. This interest, however, is precisely what has opened our thinking and understanding to be able to come to a clearer view of the world around us. Moreover, Laozi's theory of the origin of the cosmos is extremely important in the history of Chinese thought. Positing the Dao as the originator of things breaks away from the old legends of gods creating the world. Laozi says that the Dao "[It is] like a forebear of the divine ancestor(s)" (Chapter 4). He leaves no place for gods (or a God), as we saw above in Chapter 42; all things follow the Dao, or self-so patterns, which means that there is no creator to emulate. Even the line "The heavens and earth are not humane, and take all things as straw dogs" (Chapter 5) expresses a creatorless understanding of the cosmos that sits in

25 The author glosses his Chinese terms *jiashe de guandian* 设定的观点 and *cunzai de guandian* 存在的观点 here with the English terms "hypothetical viewpoint" and "existential viewpoint." The latter likely refers to a viewpoint from within existence, i.e. an experiential or empirical viewpoint.

direct opposition to ancient Chinese superstitions and their restrictions on human behavior. When Laozi speaks of the heavens (*tian*), he is talking about what naturally arises from the Dao, not higher forces possessing will or intention. The heavens are not an ultimate power, and people cannot upset them (as opposed to traditional beliefs). Laozi's theory thereby proposes that each thing develop along its own path, or according to its own self. The historical influence of this thought proves his metaphysics extremely useful.

When the Dao comes into the human world it expresses certain patterns, the implications of which for humans are clear. These patterns include "self-so and non-action," "emptiness and tranquility," "softness and weakness," "not struggling," and "downward conduct." These characteristic tendencies of the Dao can be found throughout the manifest world. By introducing these ideas, Laozi hopes to create a more harmonious society. His society, like every society in the world, was full of both hidden and apparent conflict, the most obvious example of which is war. The *Laozi* explicitly and repeatedly denounces war; however, it does caution that war can be unavoidable, and one must nevertheless prepare oneself to face it if necessary.[26]

We can thereby see that Laozi had many goals in writing his classic; and yet if one looks at just one or two aspects of his thought he is easily misinterpreted. Scholars have argued that Laozi's thought is negative, pessimistic, or advocates ignoring society and becoming a hermit. These are all gross misreadings of the *Laozi*. As shown above, he is very much interested in society, and especially politics. Truly, he does condemn taking credit for achievements, seeking personal gain, or striving for fame, but that is because he sees people behaving viciously and hurting one another when they engage in such behavior. He wants people to make great achievements, but not at the price of harming others. People should help one another and contribute to society, which is a positive and optimistic way to integrate oneself into humanity.

Laozi's advocacy of "emptiness and tranquility" is both critical of and illuminating for how we live our lives. Remaining empty and still is an emotional and mental state that preserves psychological focus. Only this type of mentality can cultivate a genuine, simple, and wise person. If we look at the way people are today, anxious, busy and always in a rush, we can understand why deep thinking and reflection are difficult. Laozi wants people to be attentive to their inner states, and cultivate themselves properly—an especially meaningful message in the modern world.

26 See Chapter 31 of the *Laozi* for a more specific description of Laozi's attitude towards war.

One

道可道，非常道 (1); 名可名，非常名 (2)。
無, 名天地之始；有, 名萬物之母 (3)。
故常無, 欲以觀其妙；常有, 欲以觀其徼 (4)。
此兩者，同出而異名 (5)，同謂之玄 (6)。玄之又玄，衆妙之門 (7)。

The Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant "Dao" (1).
The name that can be named is not the constant "name" (2).
"*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]," names the beginning of heaven and earth.
"*You* 有 [presence, having, being]," names the mother of all things (3).
Thus, for constant "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]," one wants to look to its *miao* 妙 [fine, splendid, exquisite, wonderful, subtlety].
For constant "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]," one wants to look to its *jiao* 徼 [fringes, border] (4).
These two arise from the same but with different names (5).
And both can be called *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] (6).[1]
The *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] of *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound], this is the gate of all subtlety (7).

Notes

1) The Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant "Dao": In this line, the character "*dao* (道)" appears three times, reading, "The Dao that can be Dao-ed is not the constant Dao." The first of these *dao*s is a concept and term commonly used in modern Chinese, such as with the word *daoli* 道理 [reasonableness, sense, justification] or most literally "principles of the Dao." The second *dao* means to speak. The third *dao* is a concept specific to Laozi's philosophy [i.e. the Dao]. Here it refers to the substance and force that constitutes the cosmos. The character for "constant" in the received text is *chang* 常 [constant], but in the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi*

1 Translator's note: *Xuan* 玄 is often translated here as "mystery." In other places, including Chapter 6, we will render it as *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound].

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帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] versions it is *heng* 恒 [everlasting, persistent].

The "constant" of "constant Dao" means eternal. It is generally understood as everlasting and unchanging. While everlasting seems apt, describing the Dao as unchanging does not fit. This is because Laozi's Dao serves as the substance of the cosmos and fundamental source and basis of the things of the world. It is eternally transforming and dynamic. Chapter 40 of the *Laozi* says, "*Fan* 反 [[to turn over, to return, to oppose, opposite, reversal] is the movement of the Dao," which shows the Dao to be a dynamic body (动体). Chapter 25 describes the Dao's operations as "[the Dao] proceeds as *zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] and is not exhausted," which again illustrates the substance of the Dao (道体) "[being] ceaselessly generative (生生不息)."

Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972) tells us: "The Dao is the general name for all changes and transformations. It moves with time and accords with the transformation of things. Although it changes, there is something unchanging present. This is called the constant…. The Dao Lao Dan 老聃[2] refers to is ever changing and without a fixed state.[3] There is neither an eternally unchanging Dao nor an eternally unchanging name…. The Dao of heaven and earth is everlasting, and heaven and earth achieve this great duration through the changing of the four seasons. If such transformation was not possible, how could there be what is called constancy?" (*Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校释 [*Explanations of the Laozi*]). Zhu describes this well. Cheng Yi 程颐 (d. 1107) in *Zhouyi Chengshi Zhuan* 周易程氏传 [*Cheng Yi's Comments on the Book of Changes*] explains that the *Yijing*'s 易经 [*Book of Changes*] section on the *heng* 恒 [everlasting, persistent] hexagram mentions, "the principles under heaven include nothing that is unchanging yet are able to remain constant (恒). Movement in the end returns to its beginning, and therefore is able to prove an inexhaustible constant. None of the things born of the cosmos, despite the solidity and thickness of mountains, is able to avoid change. Therefore, constancy is not spoken of as 'fixed singularity' (一定). 'Fixed singularity' is unable to be constant. Only changing with time is the constant Dao." Cheng's explanation of "the constant 'Dao'" as "changing with time" fits precisely with Laozi's meaning.

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2 Tr. note: Another way to refer to Laozi.

3 Tr. note: Zhu uses a line from the *Yijing* to express this idea: *biandong bu ju, zhouliu liu xu* 变动不居，周流六虚.

2) The name that can be named is not the constant "name": The first instance of "name" (名) here refers to the names given to specific things. The second is simply a verb used in the mundane sense of using a word to refer to an object. The third appearance of "name" is a use specific to Laozi that refers to the Dao's name.

Jiang Xichang (Chiang Hsi-Chang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "The *Xinshu* 心术 [*Arts of the Heart-Mind*] chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*] reads, 'names are how sages record the things of the world.' The commentary on the *Qi Fa* 七法 [*Seven Standards*] chapter [allegedly by Fang Xuanling 房玄龄 (d. 648)] records, 'names are how one designates (命) things.' These names are used by people to name things. This meaning is understandable to the average mind, and the first 'name' should be understood in this way. The second 'name' is used as a verb. 'The constant name' is a true, eternal, and unchanging name. This is Laozi referring to the [particular use of the term] 'name' used in his book. The meaning of the [particular use of the term] 'name' as used in Laozi's book differs from that commonly used by people. Laozi was deeply afraid that later generations would each adopt their own common [understandings of the term] 'name' in reading the *Laozi*, which would differ vastly [from Laozi's original intention]. He therefore placed this line at the opening of his work to clarify this." (*Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*].)

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004) states, "Whether or not it is possible to use names and language to express true knowledge is a major issue within ancient Chinese philosophy. The Daoists believe names and language are not sufficient for expressing true knowledge, and that true knowledge is beyond names and language" (*Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*Outline of Chinese Philosophy*].)

3) "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]," names the beginning of heaven and earth. "*You* 有 [presence, having, being]" names the mother of all things: "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" is the primordial origin of the cosmos, and "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" is the foundation and source of all things. "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" and "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" both refer to *the Dao*. This indicates the process of the Dao's movement from *you* 有 [presence, having, being] without material form into the manifest world of material form.

These parallel statements have historically had two different major readings. The above translation follows the first, which reads *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] as

the subjects of statements, and name (名) as part of the predicate. The alternative reading takes *wuming* 无名 [without name, nameless] and *youming* 有名 [having name] as the subjects of the statements, giving us Wing-tsit Chan's (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994) translation of "the Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; the Named is the mother of all things." (Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 139). This follows Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) and Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) readings of this line, and traditionally the majority of scholars have followed Wang Bi here. Wang Anshi 王安石 (d. 1086), on the other hand, adopts the first reading. He explains, "'*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]' is what [is used] to name the start of heaven and earth; '*you* 有 [presence, having, being]' is what [is used] to name its terminus, and therefore is said to be the mother of all things." (*Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben* 王安石老子注辑本 [*Wang Anshi's Commentary to the Laozi*].) Miao Ershu 缪尔纾 (d. 1959) writes that both readings are acceptable. (*Laozi xin zhu* 老子新注 [*New Commentary on the Laozi*].)

Note: "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" and "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]", these paired concepts, central to Chinese ontology and cosmology, are rooted in the *Laozi*. Chapter 40 of the received version of the *Laozi* states: "The things of the world originate in *you* 有 [presence, having, being], and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] originates in *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]." (The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*], however, read, "the things of the world originate in *you* 有 [presence, having, being], and originate in things (物)".) This corroborates the first reading. Those who advocate the second reading, however, are also supported by internal evidence within the text. This includes Chapter 32's "the Dao is constantly nameless," as well as Chapter 25's "I do not know its name, when forced to apply a word to it, it is called 'the Dao'." Therefore, the two interpretations of this line are both viable. In consideration of the philosophical implications of the passage, I have opted for the first reading.

4) For constant "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]," one wants to look to its subtlety. For constant "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]," one wants to look to its fringes: By constantly embodying *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being], one sees the subtle profundity of the Dao. By constantly embodying *you* 有 [presence, having, being] we see the outlines of the Dao.

The character here rendered as "fringes" (徼) has been interpreted in a number of ways by previous scholars:

First, it has been understood as meaning the end point (归结). Wang Bi comments, "*jiao* 徼 [fringes, border] means returning to a final end (归终)."[4]

Second, it is read as the character *qiao* 窍 [aperture or orifice], as found in the Huang Maocai 黄茂材 (d. 907) manuscript. Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) writes: "*Jiao* 徼 [fringes, border] should be taken as *qiao* 窍 [aperture or orifice]. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] reads, '*qiao* 窍 [aperture or orifice] means *kong* 空 [empty, hole, cavity]'." (*Laozi jiao gu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]).

Third, it can be taken as the character *jiao* 皦 [white, bright, clear, distinct], as seen in the *Dunhuang ben* 敦煌本 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*]. Zhu Qianzhi writes: "It is fitting to follow the Dunhuang Manuscript's use of *jiao* 皦 [white, bright, clear, distinct].... In the phrase 'for constant "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" look to its *miao* 妙 [fine, splendid, exquisite, wonderful],' the character *miao* 妙 [fine, splendid, exquisite, wonderful] should be read *weimiao* 微眇 [subtlety]. Xun Yue's 荀悦 (d. 209) *Shen jian* 申鉴 [*Extended Reflections*] states, 'when patterns or principles are concealed, profound, or abstruse, this is called *miao* 妙 [fine, splendid, exquisite, wonderful].' In the phrase 'for constant "you 有 [presence, having, being]" look to its *jiao* 皦 [white, bright, clear, distinct],' the character *jiao* 皦 [white, bright, clear, distinct] means bright and clear, and is paired and contrasted with *miao* 妙 [fine, splendid, exquisite, wonderful]. This means that *jiao* 皦 [white, bright, clear, distinct] should be said to be the clear display of patterns or principles."

Fourth, it can be read as "border." Lu Deming 陆德明 (d. 630) notes: "*Jiao* 徼 [fringes, border] means edge." (*Laozi yinyi* 老子音义 [*Phonological and Semantic Commentary of the Laozi*.) Dong Sijing 董思靖 (13th century; dates unknown) states, "*jiao* 妙 [fine, splendid, exquisite, wonderful] means boundary." (*Daode zhenjing jie* 道德真经解 [*Explanations of the Genuine Daodejing*].) Chen Jingyuan 陈景元 (d. 1094) writes, "the borders of the great way (the Dao) have small paths called *jiao* 徼 [fringes, border]." Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) explains, "*jiao* 徼 [fringes, border] seems to mean areas of boundaries or extremes. The 'sprouts' Mengzi (Mencius) 孟子 (d. 289 BCE) speaks of are this." The translation here follows this fourth interpretation, and thus adopts the term "fringes."

4 Tr. note: To understand the meaning of Chen Guying's "归结" and Wang Bi's "归终" here, one has to refer to the entire comment of Wang Bi: "徼，归终也。凡有之为利，必以无为用。欲之所本，适道而后济。故常有欲，可以观其终物之徼也".

Like the paired lines that precede them, these two statements can also be read with either *you* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] as their topics or with having desires (有欲) or not having desires (无欲) as their topics. Wang Bi reads the lines according to the latter, and the majority of scholars throughout history have followed him here. However, this chapter [means to] discuss the metaphysical substance (体) of the Dao, while in Laozi's philosophy of life, he believes that having desires obstructs our ability to know the Dao. Accordingly, "constantly having desires" naturally cannot entail the insight of the horizon of the Dao. Therefore, the proper reading here should follow the preceding lines, and take *you* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] as the topics.

Additionally, the *Tianxia* 天下 [*The World Under Heaven*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] states, "Lao Dan acquired these ways [of the ancient *the Dao*] and was pleased at this. He established them on constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being]." Zhuangzi's constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] here refer precisely to these concepts as mentioned in these lines of the *Laozi*. This has been the subject of commentary by scholars from the Song dynasty to the present:

Wang Anshi writes: "The Dao originally arises through *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]. Therefore constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] reflects the Dao's subtlety. The function of the Dao always pertains to [the category] *you* 有 [presence, having, being]. Therefore, in constant *you* 有 [presence, having, being] we are able to see the Dao's outline."

Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112) explains: "Sages embody the Dao as it functions under heaven, they enter into myriad *you* 有 [presence, having, being] yet still 'constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being],' and so from/dependent on this they observe the subtlety [of the Dao]. They embody its ultimate *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] yet still 'constant *you* 有 [presence, having, being],' and so from/dependent on this [sages] observe the outline [of the Dao]." (*Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*].)

Wang Qiao (d. 1601) states: "The traditional annotations interpreting these lines as 'having name' (有名) and 'without name' (无名) seem to give a reading unrelated to the meaning of the text. The reading 'without desires' (无欲) and 'having desires' (有欲) I am afraid obstructs the lines'

original intention. One does not hear Laozi discussing having and not having desires." (*Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*].)

Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907) tells us: "Duke Sima of Wen (Sima Guang 司马光 [d. 1086]) and Wang Anshi break the line after *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being], and I follow this. The following statement, 'these two arise together but with different names, and both can be called darkness (玄),' carries forward these two concepts. If it is read as continuous with 'without desires' and 'having desires,' how could 'having desires' be said to be 'darkness (玄)'?" (*Zhuzi pingyi* 诸子平议 [*Evaluations of the Masters*].)

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920) writes that the "'constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being]' of the *Tianxia* 天下 chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子, are this chapter of the *Laozi*'s 'constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]' and 'constant *you* 有 [presence, having, being]'." He therefore sees the grammatical parsing of these lines as preserving the concepts already present in the *Zhuangzi*. (*Du lao zhaji* 读老札记 [*Reading Notes on the Laozi*].)

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) advocates a reading in line with this translation. He explains: "In order to emphasize the importance of 'constant *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]' and 'constant *you* 有 [presence, having, being],' they are placed at the beginning of the lines. This type of sentence structure has always been present in ancient writings."

5) These two arise from the same but with different names: The Mawangdui versions read, "these two arise from the same; their different names address the same." "These two" refers to the concepts of *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] of the above lines.

Wang Anshi notes: "The 'two' here are the *you* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] of the Dao, which both emerge through *the Dao*. Scholars often take *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] as pure essence and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] as vulgar, not understanding that both arise from the Dao. Thus it is said 'both can be called darkness (玄).'"

Tong Shuye 童书业 (d. 1968) states: "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being], or the Dao's 'subtlety' and 'fringes,' these are what 'arise from the same [source] but with different names.' In terms of their sameness, we find a condition in which they are undifferentiated, which is therefore called 'darkness (玄).'"

6) *Xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound]: This refers to something deep, abstruse, expansive, and profound.

Su Zhe writes: "All things distant that cannot be ultimately reached must appear to us as *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound]. Therefore, Laozi's constancy houses its extreme in *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound]." (*Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*]).

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) writes: "*Xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] means far-reaching and unable to be differentiated." (*Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text*]).

Wu Cheng states: "*Xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] means to be concealed, obscure, and unfathomable." (*Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真经注 [*Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*]).

Zhang Dainian writes: "The notion of '*xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound]' is also another countenance of the notion of the Dao." (*Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*Outline of Chinese Philosophy*]).

7) This is the gate of all subtlety: The way of access to all "subtlety" (妙) here refers to the Dao.

Contemporary Translation

The Dao that can be expressed in language, is not the constant Dao; the name that can be expressed in words is not the constant name.

Wu 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being], is the origin-beginning (本始) of the forming of heaven and earth. *You* 有 [presence, having, being] is the root-source (根源) of the creation of all things.

Therefore, [one] often discern and contemplate *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] for the awesome subtleties, often discern and contemplate *you* 有 [presence, having, being] for outlining hints.

Wu 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] have an identical source, but differ in how they are called, both can be said to be very dark and deep. Dark and deep, and dark and deep, this is the gate of all awesome subtleties.

Analysis and Explanation

The entirety of this chapter is describing the Dao. This *the Dao* is the metaphysical *the Dao* of true existence, which is unable to be spoken of directly. No language is capable of describing it directly, just as no concept is able to refer to it directly.

The Dao is the highest category in Laozi's philosophical thought. Within the *Laozi*, this idea contains several aspects. First, it is the substance (体) that composes the world. Second, it is the force that creates the cosmos. Third, it is the laws that drive the activity of the things of the world. Forth, it is a principle of human conduct. This chapter focuses on the Dao as the source and foundation of all existence. It is the prime mover of the natural world. It possesses unlimited potential and generative force, and the vitality of the things of the world are all expressions of the inexhaustible generativity of the Dao's concealed potential.

Wu 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] are used in reference to the Dao. They describe the dual aspects of the process of realization in which the Dao moves from being without material form to existence in material form.

Laozi's conceptualization of "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" is not equivalent to nothingness. Rather, as the Dao involves certain aspects of potentiality, it is "hidden" prior to its becoming actuality. The Dao in this state of seclusion from the world prior to form cannot be known to our senses. Therefore, Laozi uses the term "wu 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" to refer to this formless aspect of the Dao. This formless Dao with the name of "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" at the same time is capable of producing all things of the natural world, and therefore Laozi also uses the term "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" to describe the intermediary state when the metaphysical *the Dao* moves from being without material form to existence in material form. Clearly, the "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" that Laozi refers to contains limitless undisplayed vital force. That is, *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] contains within it unlimited *you* 有 [presence, having, being]. The continuity between *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] lies in the expression of the active process of the metaphysical *the Dao's* actualization, which occurs through its production of all things. This process closely connects the transcendent *the Dao* with the concrete and particular things of the world. This makes the metaphysical *the Dao* a matter of great significance rather than a merely empty concept.

This chapter principally tells us: Firstly, the Dao possesses the quality of ineffability and is something that cannot be conceptualized. Secondly, the Dao is the origin and foundation of all things. Many people believe that Laozi understands the Dao and its patterns or principles to be mysterious and unfathomable, the "darkness (玄) of darkness (玄)." In fact, in this phrase Laozi is actually simply explaining that the place deep within the deepest origin and foundation is the Dao out of which all things arise. As for Laozi's statement

that the Dao cannot be named, he has in fact already provided us with several concepts that help us understand how to interpret this, principally the idea that the Dao is ineffable and cannot be conceptualized. In Chapter 25, Laozi states that this metaphysical substance (体) of true existence is a thing characterized by a state of undifferentiation. There is therefore no name for it, and Laozi makes do by referring to it as *the Dao*. This designation, however, is adopted for the sake of convenience. When Laozi discusses the substance of the Dao (道体), he generally does so through a method of inversion. He makes use of many appellations drawn from the empirical world in order to describe it, and then disqualifies them one by one. This shows that such appellations based in the world of experience are all unable to fully describe the Dao, and thereby inversely shows the abstruse profundity of the Dao.

Two

天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已(1)；皆知善之為善，斯不善已。
有無相生(2)，難易相成，長短相形(3)，高下相盈(4)，音聲相和(5)，
前後相隨(6)。
是以聖人(7)處無為(8)之事，行不言(9)之教；萬物作而不為始(10)，
生而不有，為而不恃(11)，功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。

All under heaven know beautiful as beautiful, then [there is] *yi* 已 [already, afterwards, then] *e* 恶 [ugly, evil, bad] (1) all know *shan* 善 [good, fine, nice] as *shan* 善 [good, fine, nice], then [there is] *yi* 已 [already, afterwards, then] not (不) *shan* 善 [good, fine, nice].

You 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] generate each other (2), difficult and easy complete (成) each other, long and short *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape] each other (3), above and below *ying* 盈 [fill, full] each other (4), tones and voices harmonize [with] each other (5), before and after follow each other (6).

Therefore, the sage (圣人) (7) takes on [the task of] non-action (无为) (8), performs no *yan* 言 [speech, speak, language] (9) instruction.[1]

The ten thousand things arise, but [the sage] does not (不) initiate [them] (10); [the ten thousand things] come into life, but [the sage] does not (不) possess (有) [them]; [the sage] acts on [them] but does not (不) rely on [them] (11). Deeds are accomplished (功成) but [the sage] does not reside [therein]. Only because [the sage] does not reside [therein], [the sage] not to be removed [away from the accomplishment].

Commentary and Explication

1) All under heaven know beautiful (美) as beautiful, then [there is] *yi* 已 [already, afterwards, then] *e* 恶 [ugly, evil, bad]: Once all in the human realm know the reason for deeming beautiful beautiful, the cognition of ugliness has already emerged. The term *e* 恶 [ugly, evil, bad] refers to ugliness. Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112) version has the particle *yi* 矣 [final particle] instead of *yi* 已 [already, afterwards, then]. *Yi* 矣 [final particle] and *yi* 已 [already, afterwards, then] used to be interchangeable.

1 Tr. note: In Chapter 43 "无言之教" is translated as "teaching that has no speech."

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Wang Anshi 王安石 (d. 1086) notes: "Beautiful (美) is the opposite of *e* 恶 [ugly, evil, bad]; *shan* 善 [good, fine, nice] is the reverse of not *shan* 善 [good, fine, nice]. This is a constant in the pattern of things."

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) comments: "The names beautiful (美) and *e* 恶 [ugly, evil, bad] are only there through mutual reliance (相因而有)."

Chen Yidian 陈懿典 (d. 1638) notes: "Once beautiful (美) is known as beautiful, not beautiful is also there."

Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (d. 1692) notes: "Though the changes in the human realm are ten thousand, they all fall under dual rubrics generated from one [source]; thus, there is beautiful (美) on the one hand and *e* 恶 [ugly, evil, bad] on the other" (cf. *Laozi yan* 老子衍 [*The Reduction* (*to Absurdity*) *of the Laozi*]).

All of the aforementioned statements indicate that the incidences or concepts of beauty and ugliness are generated in opposition to each other.

Note: The discussed sentences are often taken to mean that once all in the human realm know the beautiful as beautiful, it has already turned ugly. Laozi's original intention is not to indicate that beautiful things "turn" ugly but that once there is the notion of beauty, there is also that of ugliness. The second sentence—"all know good as good, then [there is] already not good"—also points to the idea of the opposites mutually generating one another. The subsequent series of sentences starting from "presence and non-presence generate each other …" are all meant to indicate [the idea] that notions take shape as pairs of opposites and become manifest in the context of this oppositional relationship.

2) *You* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] generate each other: Here, *you* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] refer to the manifestness and hiddenness of things and affairs in the phenomenal realm. The sense of these terms in this fragment is the same as it is in Chapter 11 ("presence (有) benefits, non-presence (无) functions"), but it is different from Chapter 1; at issue in Chapter 1 is the presence and nonpresence of the substance of the Dao (道体) in the noumenal realm. In the received text, the sentence in question is preceded by the conjunction *gu* 故 [thus, therefore]; this graph is missing in the *Dunhuang ben* 敦煌本 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*], the Suizhou stele version, and Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) edition. It is also absent in the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] and the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions, hence its omission here.

3) *Xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape]: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version has *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite] instead. Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown), Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639), and other old editions read *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape]. The *Mawangdui* versions read *xing* 刑 [punishment, to punish]. *Xing* 刑 [punishment, to punish] is phonetically close to *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape] and therefore used to serve as a loanword for it; [in the context of the *Mawangdui* versions,] *xing* 刑 [punishment, to punish] is the same as *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape]. (*Boshu Laozi zhuyi yu yanjiu* 帛书老子注译与研究 [*Research on Interpretations and Annotations of Laozi Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*].)

   Bi Yuan 毕沅 (d. 1797) comments: "The graph *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite] did not exist in antiquity. *Xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape] and *qing* 倾 [to lean, to incline, to tend] rhyme, and so the character here ought not to be *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite]" (*Laozi Daodejing kao yi* 老子道德经考异 [*A Comparative Investigation of the Various Versions of Laozi's Daodejing and its Commentaries*].) Bi's statement is acceptable, hence the graph's amendation based on Heshang Gong's and Fu Yi's versions.

4) *Ying* 盈 [fill, full]: All received texts read *qing* 倾 [to lean, to incline, to tend] instead. Here, the graph is amended based on the *Mawangdui* versions. Note: *Ying* 盈 [fill, full] is a loanword for *cheng* 呈 [to display an appearance, to assume a shape]; characters pronounced *ying* 盈 [fill, full] and *cheng* 呈 [to display an appearance, to assume a shape] used to serve as loanwords for one another. *Cheng* 呈 [to display an appearance, to assume a shape] has the same meaning as *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape] used in the previous line; to state that "above and below display (呈) each other (相呈)" is thus the same as to say that they become manifest in the context of an oppositional relationship. The *Guodian* edition has *ying* 浧 [full], which is interchangeable with *ying* 盈 [fill, full].

5) Tones and voices harmonize [with] each other: The tones of musical instruments and human voices are in mutual harmony. The *Yue ji* 乐记 [*Book of Music*][2] records: "The patterned (成文) sounds are called tunes." Being patterned (成文) means forming rhythm.

6) Before and after follow each other: In the *Mawangdui* versions, the characters *heng* 恒 [everlasting, persistent] and *ye* 也 [also, too] are added after this sentence.

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2 Tr. note: The text that Chen Guying refers to—in the form of a book—is the "乐记 [*Record of music*]" of the *Book of Rites*. There was supposed to be an individual *Book of Music*, but the book is lost.

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992) notes: "The phrase '*heng* 恒 [everlasting, persistent] *ye* 也 [also, too]' serves to summarize the six preceding sentences and cannot be omitted; it has long been absent from the received text. According to the *Laozi*, nameable phenomena—presence and non-presence, difficult and easy, long and short, above and below, tones and voices, and before and after etc.—exist relative to their respective opposites. They also depend on and transform into these opposites. Implicit here is rudimentary dialectical thinking" (*Laozi shu zheng* 老子疏证 (vol. 2) [*Commentaries and Exegesis of the Laozi*] of the *Zhou Qin dao lun fa wei* 周秦道论发微 [*Investigation of the Discourse on the Dao in the Zhou and Qin Dynasties*]. However, the phrase '*heng* 恒 [everlasting, persistent] *ye* 也 [also, too]' is absent in the *Guodian* version, as well as the received text. Therefore, the phrase '*heng* 恒 [everlasting, persistent] *ye* 也 [also, too]' as it appeared in the *Mawangdui* versions is likely to have been added by later generations [and does not belong to the original text].

7) The sage (圣人): This is the highest ideal personhood of Daoism, different from the Confucian counterpart. The Confucian sage is a paragon of morality; the Daoist "sage" is an embodiment of self-so (自然)—they expand the realm of inner life (生命), lifting all restrictions impeding the free activity of body and mind. The Daoist "sage" and the Confucian sage differ in their stance on politics, human life, and the cosmos. They must not be conflated. In this book, "sage" is interpreted following Yan Lingfeng's 严灵峰 (d. 1999) *Laozi da jie* 老子达解 [*Comprehensive Interpretation of the Laozi*], as "someone in line with the Dao (有道的人)."

Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 (d. 1998) comments: "Laozi's sagacity is doing humans' best (人之能事) to emulate the non-doing (无事) conducted by heaven and earth." (Cited after *Guan zhui pian* 管锥篇 [*Pipe-Awl Collection*], vol. 2, p. 421.)

8) Non-action (无为): Not to interfere, not to take reckless action.

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004) comments: "The doctrine of non-action stems from Laozi. Non-action has the same meaning as spontaneity (自然)."

Holmes H. Welch (d. 1981) writes: "*Wu wei* [non-action (无为)] does not mean to avoid all action but rather all hostile, aggressive action." (*Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, p. 33.)

Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994) notes: "It [non-action (无为)] is, rather, a peculiar way, or, more exactly, the natural way, of behavior … the way of *wu-wei* [non-action (无为)] is the way of spontaneity." ("The Story of Chinese Philosophy," in *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* edited by Charles A. Moore, p. 40.)

Benjamin Schwartz (d. 1999) writes: "Yen Fu also interprets Lao-tzu's [Laozi's] conception of the 'non-activity' (*wu-wei* [non-action (无为)]) of the ruler to mean that the good ruler will make it possible for the people to act on their own behalf. Where the people's physical, intellectual, and moral powers have been developed to a maximum, wealth and power will be achieved without constant activity on the part of the ruler." (*In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*, p. 271.)

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001) notes: "Laozi's notion of non-action means not to act in an unbridled and reckless manner, not to pursue one's self-interest, and by abandoning all selfish thoughts and calculations, [one] acts according to self-so (自然) principles of heaven and earth. In the spontaneous realm of heaven and earth, the ten thousand things are born in all sorts of shapes, and grow up to become all kinds of forms, each one leading a full life—riverside willow trees grow green shoots; camellias in the mountain produce pink flowers; birds fly high in the sky; fish leap [due to joy (跃) of] out of the deep waters. In this realm, there is no active will, nor is there any value consciousness. Everything is precisely as it is in and of itself; it is so spontaneously; there is absolutely no artificiality." [*Laozi* 老子, trans. Chen Guanxue (KoarnHack Tarn) 陈冠学].

9) No *yan* 言 [speech, language, speak]: Not to order or command, not to decree. *Yan* 言 [speech, language, speak] refers to governmental and educational orders. Speechless instruction is informal supervision and education, subtle and imperceptible guidance.

Ye Mengde 叶梦得 (d. 1148) notes: "Orders, commands, teachings, and admonitions: none of it is not speech." (Cf. *Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*].)[3]

10) The ten thousand things arise, but [the sage] does not (不) *shi* 始 [beginning, begin, start, initiate] [them]: Wang Bi's text reads, "the ten thousand things arise therein (焉) and [the sage] does not reject [them] (万物作焉而不辞);" Fu Yi's version and the *Dunhuang* edition read, "the ten thousand things arise therein (焉) but [the sage] does not make them *shi* 始 [beginning, begin, start, initiate] (万物作焉而不为始)." The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)], too, has *shi* 始 [beginning, begin, start, initiate]. The *Guodian* version has *shi* 𠂤, which means to master, to rule. Therefore, "not to *shi* 𠂤" has the meaning of non-interference. Lu Xisheng's 陆希声 (d. 895 or 901) edition, the Kai Yuan

3 Tr. note: Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112) has a book with the same title (*Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*]), cited in Chapter 1.

era (713–741) text and a citation in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御览 [*Imperial Reader of the Taiping Era*] do not feature the character *yan* 焉 [therein]. Nor does the *Guodian* version, hence its omission here.

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920) writes: "Wang Bi's commentary to Chapter 17 reads, 'The great person is above, residing in the affair of non-action, performing speechless instruction; the ten thousand things arise therein but are not made to begin (而不为始).' These phrases are all cited from *Laozi* Chapter 2, attesting to the fact that Wang Bi's version should have read *bu wei shi* 不为始 [not made to begin]."

Tao Shaoxue 陶邵学 (d. 1908) notes: "The received Wang Bi text has *ci* 辞 [utterance, to dismiss, to decline]. This is an inaccurate and unwarranted change. '*Bu wei shi* 不为始 [not made to begin]' is superior in terms of both sense and rhyme." (*Jiao Laozi* 校老子 [*Examining the Laozi*].)

Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植 (b. 1947) notes: "As for the graph *shi* 𠂤 [to master, to rule], its right hand side is an abbreviation of *si* 司 [to control, to be in charge of], (...) its extended meaning is to master, to dominate." (*Guodian zhujian Laozi shixi yu yanjiu* 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*An Analysis and Study of the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*].)

Peng Hao 彭浩 (b. 1944) comments: "*Shi* 𠂤 is pronounced the same as *shi* 始 [beginning, begin, start, initiate]. Both the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) and Fu Yi's versions read *shi* 始 [beginning, begin, start, initiate] ... The homophony of *ci* 辞 [utterance, to dismiss, to decline] and *shi* 始 [beginning, begin, start, initiate] has led to an error." (*Guodian chu jian Laozi jiaodu* 郭店楚简老子校读 [*Critical Reading of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*].)

11) [The ten thousand things] come into life, but [the sage] does not (不) possess (有) [them]; [the sage] acts on [them] but does not (不) rely on [them]: The *Mawangdui* versions read *fu* 弗 [not] instead of *bu* 不 [not] in both instances. In the *Guodian* text, the sentence "come into life but are not possessed" is absent and the subsequent one reads *cheng er fu ju* 成而弗居 [are accomplished but not resided (in)]. In the *Guodian* version, the sentence has four characters, making the text symmetrical. This is superior to the other versions.

Contemporary Translation

Once all in the human realm know the reason for deeming beautiful beautiful, the notion of ugliness has already arisen; once all know the reason for deeming good good, the notion of badness has already arisen.

Presence and non-presence generate each other, difficult and easy effect each other, long and short display each other, above and below render each other manifest, tones and voices respond to each other in harmony, before and after follow each other in sequences.

Therefore, someone in line with the Dao handles the affairs of life through an attitude of non-action, carrying out "speechless" guidance. The ten thousand things arise and they do not disturb them; they raise them but does not consider them to be theirs; they nurture them but are not confident in their ability; great deeds are accomplished but they do not boast about themselves. Precisely because they do not boast about themselves, their merits shall not sink into oblivion.

Argument

According to Laozi, the metaphysical Dao "standing by itself, does not change (独立不改)" [Chapter 25] and is perpetually existing; all things and affairs in the phenomenal realm, on the other hand, are relative and in flux.

Based on the example of beauty against ugliness and goodness against badness, this chapter points out that all things, and their names, concepts, and evaluations emerge in the context of the relationship of opposition. Since this relationship is regularly in flux, all things and their names, concepts, and evaluations are also in constant flux. The point of the sequence starting from "presence and non-presence generate each other …" is to indicate that all things show their mutual generative function within the relationship of opposition: they oppose each other but also depend on and complement each other.

All concepts and values in the human realm are established by humans and permeated by subjective attachments and arbitrary judgements, thus giving rise to unrelenting arguments and disputes. Someone in line with the Dao, in contrast, does not act in an unbridled and reckless manner, order people about or stir things up, but transcends subjective attachments and arbitrary judgements, handling affairs through [an attitude of] "non-action" and carrying out "speechless" instruction.

The so-called "sage" (圣人) is an ideal figure. The distinction between the sage and the multitude is by no means a class distinction; the sage is merely one step ahead of the multitude in terms of actual conscious action (自觉活动). In handling affairs, he abides by natural regularities and does not take forceful or reckless action. In the world, the ten thousand things arise joyfully, each displaying its distinct form. The sage merely assists them from the sidelines, allowing each to develop its full character.

In social life, Laozi encourages people to display their creative force, but not to extend their impulses. This is the meaning of "they raise them but does not consider them to be theirs; they nurture them but are not confident in their ability; great deeds are accomplished but they do not boast about themselves." The terms "*sheng* 生 [birth, generation, life, generate, live]," "*wei* 为 [enact, act, make, act on]" and "*gong cheng* 功成 [deeds accomplished]" are encouragements to make an effort, to build, to display one's subjective agency, to contribute one's strength, to accomplish undertakings for the public. *Sheng* 生 [birth, generation, life, generate, live] and *wei* 为 [enact, act, make, act on] refer to exerting human effort as the natural conditions permit. Thus, the fruits of human effort need not be usurped as one's own. The phrases "not possess (不有)" "not to rely on (不恃)" and "not reside in (弗居)" call for the dissolution of selfish desire for possession. The root and source of conflicts in human society is the extension of people's selfish desire for possession, hence Laozi's active propagation of the spirit of "accomplishing while not possessing."

Three

不尚賢　(1)，使民不爭　(2)；不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；不見可欲 (3)，使民心不亂 (4)。
是以聖人之治，虛其心 (5)，實其腹，弱其志 (6)，強其骨。常使民無知無欲 (7)。使夫智者不敢為也 (8)。為無為 (9)，則無不治。

Not promoting talented [persons] (1) makes the people not contend (2). Not valuing goods that are difficult to get makes the people not be robbers. Not displaying desirable [objects] (3) makes the heart-minds of the people not disorderly (4).

Therefore, the *zhi* 治 [to govern, to bring into order, (in) order] of the sage [is this]: empty *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] heart(s) (5), fill *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] belly(s), weaken *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] will(s) (6), strengthen *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] bones.[1] Constantly make the people [have] no knowledge, no desire (7). Make the wise *bu gan wei* 不敢为 [not to dare to act] (8). *Wei* 为 [act, do, for] *wu* 无 [not, non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [act, do, for] (9), and then nothing is not *zhi* 治 [to govern, to bring into order, (in) order].

Commentary and Explanation

1) Not promoting talented [persons]: Not excessively praising talented persons. According to some, the phrase means not flaunting riches (based on Chiang Hsi-Chang's [Jiang Xichang] 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) comment).

Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version reads: "'*Xian* 贤 [talented, noble, deserving]' here refers to conventional talent, thus discarding basic quality and promoting adornment. '*Bu shang* 不尚 [not to promote]' here means not to ennoble them with appanages and offices" (*Heshang Gong zhu* 河上公注 [*Heshang Gong Commentary*].)

1 Tr. note: *Qi* 其 is a third person pronoun, singular or plural. Here, it can be interpreted as referring back to the ruler (empty *his* heart …) or to the people (empty *their* hearts …). I keep this ambiguity throughout the section unless the particular commentator's intention is made clear in the quoted material.

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Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "*Shang xian* 尚贤 [to be fond of reputation]. Reputation is the sprout of contention" (cf. *Daodejing jie* 道德经解 [*Explication of the Daodejing*]).

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] says: '*Xian* 贤 [talented, noble, deserving], many riches; from *bei* 贝 [cowry, (an early form of) money], phonetic component *qian* 臤 [a kind of].' The phrase *bu shang xian* 不尚贤 means not to flaunt riches. The logic here is the same as in subsequent phrasing—'not valuing goods that are difficult to get' and 'not displaying desirable [objects]'—at issue in all three being property. The *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] text has *bao* 宝 [treasure, gem, precious] instead of *xian* 贤 [talented, noble, deserving]. This might be a later side annotation. Not to flaunt riches such that the people become discontent is the correct original meaning of the text" (cf. *Laozi jiao gu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]). Jiang's comment is rather worth considering.

Feng Dafu 冯达甫 (d. 1997): "Many contemporary scholars follow Wang Bi, which should perhaps be reconsidered. The *Liu shu gu* 六书故 [*Explanation of the Chinese Characters of the Six Categories*] says: '*Xian* 贤 [talented, noble, deserving], [one possesses] more goods and money than others.'" (*Laozi yi zhu* 老子译注 [*A Contemporary Translation of the Laozi with Annotations*]).

2) Not contend: Refers to not contending for merit, name, fame, or reputation (名), returning to the self-so (*Heshang Gong zhu* 河上公注 [*Heshang Gong Commentary*]).

3) Desirable [objects]: This means much desire.

Note: According to Xu Renfu's 徐仁甫 (d. 1988) *Guang shi ci* 广释词 [*The Expanded Explanation of Expletives*], "*ke* 可 [can, able] is close to *duo* 多 [much, many] … Chapter 46 of the *Laozi* reads 'there is no greater crime than desiring to obtain [objects]' but it is quoted in the *Han shi wai zhuan* 韩诗外传 [*The Outer Commentary to the Book of Songs by Master Han*] as '*duo yu* 多欲 [(there is no greater crime than) much desire]' … the poem *Ai Ying* in the Chapter *Jiu zhang* of the *Chuci* 楚辞 [*Songs of Chu*] reads: '*Ceng bu zhi sha zhi wei qiu xi, shu liang dong men zhi ke wu* 曾不知夏之为丘兮，孰两东门之可芜 [(I) did not realize that the palace had been turned into ruins, who let the two eastern gates overgrow (with weeds)].' *Ke wu* 可芜 [literally, can overgrow] refers to *duo wu* 多芜 [much overgrowth]." "*Ke yu* 可欲 [desirable (objects)]" should be interpreted as "*duo yu* 多欲 [much desire]." "*Ke* 可 [can, able]" perhaps

can be read as "*huo* 夥 [much, many]," as they both are characters that belong to the rhyme of a *ge* 歌 [sing, song]. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] dictionary says: "In Qi, *duo* 多 [much, many] is referred to as *huo* 夥 [much, many]." The *Fang yan* 方言 [*Dictionary of Local Expressions*] reads: "A multitude of things is referred to as *kou* 寇; on the outskirts of Qi and Song and the border of Chu and Wei, it is called *huo* 夥." In the *Shi ji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] (*Chen She shi jia Suo yin* 陈涉世家索隐) cites Fu Qian's 服虔 (Han dynasty, dates unknown) statement: "The people of Chu rendered *duo* 多 [much many] as *huo* 夥 [much, many]." Qu Yuan and Laozi were from Chu, making it plausible that they would use the graph *huo* 夥 [much, many] instead of *ke* 可 [can, able].

4) Makes the heart-minds of the people not disorderly: In Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version, the character *min* 民 [the people] is followed by the character *xin* 心 [heart-mind] which is absent in the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*].

5) Empty *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] heart(s): Open up people's minds.

Shi Deqing: "[The idea is to] cut off deluded thought, hence it is said: 'Empty *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] heart(s).'"

Wing-tsit Chan (Chong Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994): "Literally, *xu* 虚 [empty, tenuous] means absolute peace and purity of mind, freedom from worry and selfish desires" (*A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 141, f. 21).

Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921): "Empty *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] heart(s) to receive the Dao; fill *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] belly(s) to [be able to] act for oneself (为我); weaken *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] will to follow the principle and not to run counter to it; strengthen *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] bones to [be able to] stand on one's own [feet] and do things."

6) Weaken *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] will: Make people's will pliable yet resilient. Note: Here, *xu* 虚 [empty, tenuous] and *ruo* 弱 [weak, feeble] are technical terms of Laozi learning—both are affirmative in meaning (just like in Chapter 16, "Attain *xu* 虚 [vacuity, emptiness, void] *ji* 极 [ultimate, unsurpassable]"; Chapter 40, "*ruo* 弱 [weak, decline] is the function of the Dao"—these, too, are affirmative). The term *xu* 虚 [empty, tenuous] in this chapter indicates an open mind, and *ruo* 弱 [weak, feeble] indicates a pliable yet resilient will.

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992): "The four *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] here refer to the ruler. Emptying his heart refers to little desire [on his part]; filling his belly refers to sufficiently storing provisions; weakening his will refers to modesty, restraint, and humility; strengthening his bones refers to resolution and an ability to stand on his own [feet]." This can be counted as a possible interpretation.

7) No knowledge, no desire: An absence of deceitful cunning and the desire to contend and to plunder.

According to Wang Bi's version we read "To hold on to one's genuine [dispositions]." That is, to maintain a pure, unadulterated, and simple mindset. Chapter 57 of the *Laozi* reads "I have no desires and the people self-purify." This is evidence that Laozi propagated "desirelessness (no desires)" as a means to maintaining a genuine and simple mindset, and that he held it as a high ideal of sagely self-cultivation.

8) The wise [do] *bu gan wei* 不敢为 [not to dare to act]: Those who take themselves to be wise do not dare to meddle. The phrase *bu gan wei* 不敢为 [not to dare to act] is also seen in Chapter 64. In Dunhuang *Laozi* A, this and the subsequent sentence reads "*Shi zhi zhe bu gan, bu wei, ze wu bu zhi* 使知者不敢，不为，则无不治 [making those who know not dare, not act, and nothing is not in order]." The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] reads "*Shi fu zhi zhe bu gan, fu wei er yi, ze wu bu zhi yi* 使夫知者不敢，弗为，则无不治矣 [making those who know not dare, not act but cease acting, and nothing is not in order]."

9) *Wei* 为 [act, do, for] *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [act, do, for]: To act through non-action, that is, to handle affairs in accord with [each thing's] the self-so.

Tong Shuye 童书业 (d. 1968): "Laozi's conception of non-action stems from the Warring States naturalism (自然主义). The conception of non-action had germinated during the Spring and Autumn period and Laozi developed it, making it the core of his political theory further connected to his philosophy of social conduct. This philosophy perceived retreat as a form of advance, staying behind as a form of priority. Applied to politics, this translates into the notion of tranquility and non-action. The social class reflected in this conception of non-action is naturally to the benefit of the *petite bourgeoisie*. The *petit bourgeois* hermits opposed the actions of the rulers, claiming that these actions brought disorder to the human realm and instability to the lives of the people. They demanded that the rulers stop acting and emulate the self-so, letting the people run their lives and develop freely."

Contemporary Translation

Not flaunting talent and exceptional ability makes the people[2] not contend for merit, fame, or reputation (名). Not valuing goods that are difficult to obtain makes the people not turn to banditry. Not displaying desirable objects makes the people not become disorderly and confused.

Therefore, in managing governmental affairs, the person of the Dao makes the minds of the people open, their lives safe and sustained, their wills pliable and resilient, and their bodies healthy and strong. He constantly makes the people devoid of (deceitful) cunning and the desire (to contend and to plunder). He makes those who take themselves to be wise not dare to act in an unbridled manner. He handles the affairs based on the principle of non-action, and nothing/no one goes astray.

Argument

Official ranks are enough to arouse contention among people. Property and goods are enough to instill greed and contention over official ranks and greed for property and goods give rise to incessant deceit and cunning. This is the main cause of disorder and conflict in society. The solution is to bring safety and sustenance to the people on the one hand, and to open their minds, on the other. "No knowledge" is not about carrying out policies aimed at stupefying the populace but about dispelling deceit and cunning. "No desire" is not about eliminating natural instincts but about checking the expansion of greed.

This chapter contains Laozi's critique of the culture of material desire.

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2 Tr. note: Literally the text says the people's heart-minds (使民众不起争心).

Four

道沖，而用之或不盈 (1)。淵兮[1]，似萬物之宗；[挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵] (2)，湛兮 (3) 似或存。吾不知誰之子，象帝之先 (4)

The Dao is *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, empty[2]], but use it [and it] *huo* 或 [perhaps] might not *ying* 盈 [fill up, full] (1). So abysmal! *Si* 似 [seemingly, as though] the ancestor of the ten thousand things. [Grinding the sharp, loosening the tangled, dimming the shine, leveling the dust.] (2) So deep (3)! As though something out there. I do not know whose child [it is]. [It is] like a forebear of the divine ancestor(s) (4).

Commentary and Explanation

1) The Dao is *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, empty], but use it [and it] *huo* 或 [perhaps] might not *ying* 盈 [fill up, full]: the Dao body is empty, but its function is inexhaustible. At issue here is the question of the Dao's body (体) and function (用). The ancient graph for *chong* 冲 [to rinse, to flush] is *z/chong* 盅 [a small cup],[3] glossed as empty. The Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) text reads *z/chong* 盅 [a small cup]. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] text says: "*Z/Chong* 盅 [a small cup], an empty vessel; the *Laozi* says: '*Dao z/chong er yong* 道盅而用之 [The Dao is empty, but use it …].'"

Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921): "This chapter describes the Dao body (道体). Only through pondering over the use of *huo* 或 [perhaps] and *si* 似 [seemingly, as though] can one get the point. The Dao construed as a thing is fundamentally indescribable" (*Laozi Daodejing pingdian* 老子道德经评点 [*Comments on the Daodejing of Laozi*].)

Wing-tsit Chan (Chong Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994): "This shows clearly that, in Taoism, function [用] is no less important than substance [体].[4] Substance is further described in *Lao tzu*, chs. 14 and 21, but here, as in *Lao tzu*, chs. 11 and 45, function (*yung* [用], also meaning use) is regarded

1 Tr. note: This is a metrical particle used for emphasis, and to introduce a caesura.

2 Tr. note: The meaning "empty" is very specific to this context.

3 Tr. note: 盅 has two pronunciations. It reads as *zhong* when it means a small cup, but *chong* when it is borrowed for 冲. (See also Chapter 42.)

4 Tr. note: We will typically translate *ti* 体 as body rather than substance. Body is a more literal and less philosophically loaded rendition of this crucial term.

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with equal respect. There is no renunciation of phenomena as is the case within certain Buddhist schools" (*A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 141).

2) Grinding the sharp, loosening the tangled, dimming the shine, leveling the dust: These four sentences might be an erroneous misplacement or "borrowing" from parts of Chapter 56 because the sentences "So abysmal! As though the ancestor of the ten thousand things" and "So deep! As though something out there" are parallel. The sentences in question are not included in the contemporary translation.

Tan Xian 谭献 (d. 1901): "These four sentences also occur in Chapter 56. It might be a mix up."

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970): "These four sentences are misplaced from Chapter 56, but editors have not deleted it, hence the repetition." (*Laozi jiao gu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]).

Chen Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944): "Ma's assessment is correct. 'So abysmal! As though the ancestor of the ten thousand things' and 'So deep! As though something out there' are linked. As the sentences in question are inserted in between, the sense of the text is rendered forced."

Comment: All aforementioned assessments are correct. Nevertheless, *Laozi boshu jiaozhu* 老子帛书校注 [*Commentary and Annotations to the Mawangdui Laozi*] contain these four sentences. The misplacement of the bamboo slip must have occurred as early as the Warring States period.

3) So deep: to sink, deep. This is describing the opacity and shapelessness of the Dao.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "*Zhan* 湛 [to sink, deep] means clear and silent."

Xi Tong 奚侗 (d. 1939): "The Dao cannot be seen, hence *zhan* 湛 [to sink, deep]. The *Shuo wen* says: '*Zhan* 湛, to sink.'" (*Laozi jijie* 老子集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Laozi*]).

4) Like a forebear of the divine ancestor(s): The Dao seems to precede the heavenly god(s). This is the same as to say that the Dao precedes the generation of the heavens and earth. (*Heshang Gong zhu* 河上公注 [*Heshang Gong Commentary*]).

Comment: The character *xiang* 象 [image, (to be) like] in '*xiang di zhi xian* 象帝之先 [like a forebear of the divine ancestor(s)]' can be interpreted in two ways, firstly, as 'to name,' to address, and secondly, as 'to seem like.' The term *xian* 先 [early, prior, at first] is similar to *zong* 宗 [ancestor] in 'the ancestor of the ten thousand things' in the preceding sentence.

> Wang Anshi 王安石 (d. 1086): "*Xiang* 象 [image, (to be) like] is the beginning of the formed; *di* 帝 [the divine ancestor(s)] is the forefather of the living things. Thus the *Xi ci* 系辞 says: 'Once apparent/seen, call it *xiang* 象 [image, (to be) like].' '*Di* 帝 [divine ancestor(s)] emerge(s) from *zhen* 震 [to shake, one of the Eight Trigrams symbolizing thunder].' [Thus,] the Dao precedes [the existence of] the heavens and earth." (*Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben* 王安石老子注辑本 [*Wang Anshi's Commentary to the Laozi*]).

Contemporary Translation

The Dao body is empty, yet its functioning is inexhaustible. So profound! It seems to be the ancestor of the myriad things. So hidden! As if gone and at the same time actually there. I do not know whence it is produced, but it can be called the forebear of the heavenly god(s).

Argument

The Dao body is formless (虚状). Yet this empty body is not nonexistent since it contains an infinite creative factor. For this reason, its functioning is inexhaustible.

This formless Dao body is the root and source of the ten thousand things. Here, Laozi has shattered the conception of divine creation.

Five

天地不仁 (1)，以萬物為芻狗 (2)；聖人不仁 (3)，以百姓為芻狗。
天地之間，其猶橐籥 (4) 乎！虛而不屈 (5)，動而愈出。
多言數窮 (6)，不如守中 (7)。

Heaven and earth are not humane (仁), (1) [they] take the ten thousand things as straw dogs (刍狗) (2); the sage is not humane (仁) (3) [they] take the hundred clans as straw dogs (刍狗).

Between heaven and earth—does it not resemble *tuo* 橐 [sack, bag] *yue* 籥 [pipe, flute] (4)! Empty but not *jue* 屈 [to use up, to exhaust] (5). Moves, the more comes out.

Duo 多 [much, many, numerous] *yan* 言 [speech, to speak] *shu* 数 [to count, number] failure (6)—this is not as good as holding on to the *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] (7).

Commentary and Explication

1) Heaven and earth are not humane (仁): Heaven and earth are not biased; they are physical, natural entities devoid of personified human feelings. The workings of the ten thousand things between heaven and earth only follow natural rules, contrary to theism, according to which such rules are biased in favor of (or against) some kind of thing—the latter is in fact a mere projection of human emotion(s).

Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) comments: "Heaven and earth give free reign to (任) the self-so (自然), not acting and not creating, the ten thousand things self-organize, hence 'not humane.' As for humaneness, [one] must create, establish, carry out, and transform; there is favor and there is action."

Heshang Gong (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: "Heaven grants and earth transforms, not by humaneness and favor, [but by] giving free reign to the self-so."

Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112): "Heaven and earth are not selfish, but listen to the self-so of the ten thousand things. Thus, the ten thousand things are born and die of their own accord—death is not [an] I maltreating it, birth is not [an] I [being] humane to it." (*Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*].)

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Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "Humaneness refers to having a heart-mind to care for something. Heaven and earth do not have a heart-mind to care for things, but give free reign to their self-generation and self-formation." (*Daode zhenjing ji zhu* 道德真经集注 [*Collected Commentaries on the Genuine Daodejing*].)

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "Not [to be] humane, is simply not to hold anything dear." (*Laozi zhenggu* 老子正诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*].)

Hu Shi 胡适 (d. 1962): "Laozi's conception of 'heaven and earth not [being] humane' seems to imply that heaven and earth are not of the same nature (性) as man. This notion of Laozi's explodes the erroneous idea prevalent in antiquity that heaven and man are of the same kind, thus laying foundations for later day natural philosophy" (*Zhongguo gudai zhexue shi* 中国古代哲学史 [*History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy*].)

Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994): "The term 'not humane' is of course extremely provocative. It may be suggested that this is Lao Tzu's emphatic way of opposing the Confucian doctrine of humanity and righteousness. Actually, the Taoist idea here is not negative but positive, for it means that Heaven and Earth are impartial, have no favorites, and are not humane in a deliberate or artificial way. This is the understanding of practically all commentators and is abundantly supported by the *Chuang Tzu* [*Zhuangzi*]. To translate it as unkind, as does Blakney, is to grossly misunderstand Taoist philosophy." (*A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 142)

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001): "The principles and laws (Dao) of the heavens and earth and the self-so belong to a sort of insentient entities devoid of typically human will, emotion, purpose-driven intention and value consciousness. [...] The principles and laws of the heavens and earth and the self-so belong to the sort of entities that are a merely physical and natural."

2) Straw dogs (刍狗): Dogs made of grass and used during sacrifice.

Su Zhe: "[People] bundle grass to make a dog to display it at a sacrifice, [they] adorn it fully and worship it. Is this out of care for it? It is [simply] appropriate at the time. Once the affair is over, [they] discard it [on the road] and passerby tread all over it. Is this out of hate for it? It, too, is [simply] appropriate at the time."

Wu Cheng: "Straw dog: the likeness of a dog made of grass and used during the rain sacrifice. It is discarded after the sacrifice and no longer

cherished. Heaven and earth do not have a heart-mind to care for things but give free reign to their self-generation and self-formation; the sage does not have a heart-mind to care for the people but gives free reign to their initiative and rest, hence the straw dog is used as a metaphor."

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "A straw dog is used during a sacrifice and discarded once the sacrifice is over. It is a metaphor for a lack of attention and forgetting. [...] According to some, it is to treat the people like grass—this is an error."

Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 (d. 1998): "Regarding the ten thousand things as straw dogs means that heaven and earth have no heart-mind, and thus, no concern. It is not that they are cruel and do not feel compassion (悯惜)." (Cited from *Guan zhui bian* 管锥编, vol. 2, p. 419)

3) The sage is not humane (仁): The sage is not biased. That is, the sage models themselves on heaven and earth giving free reign to spontaneity.

Heshang Gong's *Commentary*: "The sage cares for and nourishes all people; [he] does not apply humaneness as a sort of favor, [but] models themselves on heaven and earth, giving free reign to being self-so."

Wang Bi: "The sages and the heavens and earth converge on efficacy."

Wu Cheng: "The sage's heart-mind is empty and does not attach itself to anything." Note: "The heart-mind [being] empty" implies a lack of prejudice.

4) *Tuo* 橐 [sack, bag] *yue* 籥 [pipe, flute]: A bellows.

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "A sack is called *tuo* 橐 [sack, bag]; bamboo pipes are called *yue* 籥 [pipe, flute]. In a metal smelting facility, a *yue* 籥 [pipe, flute] attached to a *tuo* 橐 [sack, bag] is used to blow air into the furnace."

Wu Cheng: "*Tuo* 橐 [sack, bag] *yue* 籥 [pipe, flute] is used during smelting and casting; it is an implement for blowing air in order to feed the fire."

Feng Dafu 冯达甫 (d. 1997): "The functioning of *Tuo* 橐 [sack, bag] *yue* 籥 [pipe, flute] is a metaphor of the functioning of nature. Nature is ceaselessly generative (生生不息)" (*Laozi yi zhu* 老子译注 [*A Contemporary Translation of the Laozi with Annotations*].)

5) Not *jue* 屈 [to use up, to exhaust]: Inexhaustible.

Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921): "*Jue* 屈 [to use up, to exhaust], pronounced *jue*, to get exhausted. 'Empty but not *jue* 屈 [to use up, to exhaust]'."

6) *Duo* 多 [much, many, numerous] *yan* 言 [speech, to speak] *shu* 数 [to count, number] failures: Superfluous and harsh decrees expedite failure and death. *Yan* 言 [speech, to speak] refers to ruling via renown-authority, education and top-down decrees (声教法令). *Duo yan* 多言 [to speak a

lot] refers to policies and decrees being excessive. *Shu* 数 [to count, number] is interchangeable with *su* 速 [quick, speed].

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "*Duo* 多 [much, many, numerous] *yan* 言 [speech, to speak] is the opposite of not (不) *yan* 言 [speech, to speak], it is also the opposite of non-action; *duo* 多 [much, many, numerous] *yan* 言 [speech, to speak] is thus the same as *you wei* 有为 [conscious or assertive action]." (*Laozi jiao gu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*].)

Wu Cheng: "*Shu* 数 [to count, number] is the same as *su* 速 [quick, speed]."

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970): "*Shu* 数 [to count, number] is a loan for *su* 速 [quick, speed]. Firstly, the *Zengzi wen* 曾子问 [*The Questions of Master Zeng*] chapter of the *Li ji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*] says: 'not knowing if its end is delayed or speedy (不知其已之迟数).' The *Commentary* says: '*Shu* 数 [to count, number], to be read as *su* 速 [quick, speed].' Secondly, the *Ren jian shi* 人间世 [*In the Human World*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] says: 'made into a coffin it is going to rot fast (以为棺椁则速腐).' Cui Zhuan's 崔撰 (3rd century; dates unknown) version reads *shu* 数 [to count, number] instead of *su* 速 [quick, speed]. Both [textual references] serve as proofs."

7) Holding on to the *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper]: Maintaining inner emptiness. Daoism puts much emphasis on the notion of *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper]. For example, Zhuangzi speaks of "nourishing the internal (养中)." The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions of the *Huangdi Sijing* 黄帝四经 [*The Yellow Emperor's Four Classics*] speak of "equilibrium (平衡)."

Yan Fu: "What is *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper]? It is the kernel of the Dao (道要)."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "The term *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] is Laozi's term for his fair and honest Dao, that is, the Dao of non-action. [...] The point of 'speaking much expedites failure—this is not as good as holding on to the *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper]' is to say that, by purposive action human rulers expedite failure, and that it is better to hold on to the Dao of purity and tranquility."

Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979): "The notion of *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] in 'holding on to the center' is different from that found in Confucianism: the Confucian *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] consists in avoiding extremes, adhering to the principle of the mean (中庸). This is not the case for Laozi; his

zhong 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] is an empty interior, akin to a bellows before it is put to use—it symbolizes an empty and non-acting Dao body." (*Laozi zhangju xin shi* 老子章句新释 [*A New Parsing, Organization, and Reading of the Laozi*].)

Xu Kangsheng 许抗生 (b. 1937): "According to Wu Cheng, '*zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] refers to the internal space where the pipe connects to the sack.' That is, it refers to the inside of a bellows. Here, to hold on to the *zhong* 中 [center, inner, heart, intermediate, proper] means to maintain a state akin to that of the emptiness and tranquility [space] between heaven and earth" (*Boshu Laozi zhuyi yu yanjiu* 帛书老子注译与研究 [*Research on Interpretations and Annotations of Laozi Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*].)

Comment: The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version has the middle part of this section. The sense is the same as in the received version.

Contemporary Translation

Heaven and earth are unbiased, they let the ten thousand things grow self-so (自然); the sage is unbiased, he lets the people develop of their own accord.

The space between heaven and earth—does it not resemble a bellows? Empty but inexhaustible, once it is in motion, there is ceaseless generation (生生不息).

Superfluous and harsh decrees have the opposite effect—they expedite failure and death. It is better to maintain emptiness and tranquility.

Argument

This section can be divided into three parts:

1) The point behind "heaven and earth are not humane" is that heaven and earth go along self-so or nature (自然) and their care is unbiased. At issue in this sentence is heaven and earth's unselfishness and non-action. "Treating the ten thousand things as straw dogs" is an expression of heaven and earth's unselfishness.

From Laozi's perspective, each phenomenon between heaven and earth functions and matures according to its own developmental pattern and inner causality.

In the past, people believed that celestial bodies, natural events, and features of the landscape had a ruler lording over them; they also regarded all encountered natural phenomena as living things. In its childhood period, humankind tended to understand and interpret nature in its own image. Humans projected their individual desires onto nature, personified nature, and believed it to be especially considerate and caring of humanity. Laozi opposed this kind of anthropomorphism. He held that all phenomena between heaven and earth operate and develop according to a natural or self-so (自然) regulatory pattern ("the Dao") untouched by the typically human feelings of attraction and repulsion or purposive intentions. Here, Laozi explodes the "ruler" theory; more importantly, he emphasizes the spontaneous development of the ten thousand things, further using this model to illuminate his ideal of good governance—emulation of natural or self-so (自然) regulatory patterns (this is the gist of the idea of the "human Dao" modelling itself on the "heavenly Dao") and going along people's self-development. This conception of freedom seeks to dispel external coercion and interference and to let people fully develop their individuality, particularity, and diversity.

2) The space between heaven and earth is vacuous. Although empty, its functioning is inexhaustible. Just like in Chapter 4, this emptiness contains an infinite creative element. Hence it is said that "the more it moves, the more comes out"—heaven and earth run their course and the ten thousand things are ceaselessly generated. This "movement" (movement in the midst of emptiness) thus turns out to be the root and source of the ten thousand beings. As can be seen, "emptiness" (虚) discussed by Laozi is not a passive notion but an active one.

3) The idea that "heaven and earth are not humane" and that they are empty are extensions of Laozi's conception of non-action (无为). Since heaven and earth are non-acting (they go along spontaneity), the ten thousand things can continue to be generated and to change. The opposite of "non-action" is coercion, rash action, and superfluous and harsh policy and decrees ("多言 [to speak a lot]")—all leading to failure and death. This is Laozi's warning regarding an interfering government.

Six

谷神不死 (1)，是謂玄牝 (2)。玄牝之門，是謂天地根。綿綿若存 (3)，用之不勤 (4)。

Gu 谷 [valley] *shen* 神 [spirit, god] [does/can] not die (1), it is called *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound][1] *pin* 牝 [female] (2). The gate of *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] *pin* 牝 [female], it is called the root of heaven and earth. *Mian mian* 綿綿 [silk floss, continuous], as though existent (3). Use it, it is inexhaustible (4).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Gu* 谷 [valley] *shen* 神 [spirit, god] [does/can] not die: "*Gu* 谷 [valley]" denotes emptiness. "*Shen* 神 [spirit, god]" denotes unpredictable change. The phrase not die (不死) is an analogy for saying that change does not stop or exhaust.

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (d. 1200): "'*Gu* 谷' [valley] marks the receptivity of emptiness. *Shen* 神 [spirit, god] refers to the idea that there is nothing that it does not respond to." (*Zhu zi yu lei* 朱子语类 [*Teachings of Zhu Xi*], vol. 125)

Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921): "Due to its emptiness it is called '*gu* 谷' [valley]; due to the inexhaustibility of its adaptations and responses it is called *spirit*; due to its unending emergence it is called undying." (*Laozi Daodejing pingdian* 老子道德经评点 [*Comments on the Daodejing of Laozi*])

Hou Wailu 侯外庐 (d. 1987): "The *dao* discussed in the *Laozi* is a progressive improvement from the Confucian and the Mohist conceptions of heavenly Dao (*tian dao* 天道). It represents progress because for Confucius and Mozi the Dao is religious, whereas in the *Laozi* it is philosophical and possesses a certain degree of natural regularity. The term '*shen* 神 [spirit, god]' is used in the *Laozi*, in '*gu* 谷 [valley] *shen* 神 [spirit, god] [does/can] not die' for example, a point later inflated by Zhu Xi, but this notion of a spirit is akin to that found in pantheism; it has been

1 Tr. note: In Chapter 1 we render *xuan* 玄 as "shimmering darkness."

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completely philosophized" (*Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中国思想通史 [*A General History of Chinese Thought*], vol. 1, p. 266).

2) *Xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] *pin* 牝 [female]: subtle and mysterious maternity, referring to a place of an ongoing generation of heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things (cf. Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998), *Laozi jiaodu* 老子校读 [*Collated Laozi*]). Here it is used to describe the unfathomable fertility of the Dao. The term *pin* 牝 [female] connotes reproduction—the Dao ("the spirit of the valley") gives birth to heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things. No trace of this procreative process can be found, however, hence the adjective dark. *Xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] has the meaning of being hidden, profound, and unfathomable.

   Zhu Xi: "*Xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] means subtle. *Pin* 牝 [female], means receptivity and the capacity to generate things. Here, the subtlest principle has a sense of ever-present and ever-going generation (生生)."

   Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112): "To call it the spirit of the valley is to speak of its efficacy (德). To call it *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] *pin* 牝 [female] (or 'dark femininity') is to speak of its achievements. The female generates the ten thousand things yet it is called dark—this is to say that the generated can be seen but the generator cannot." (*Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explaining the Laozi*])

   Che Zai 车载 (d. 1970): "The phrase 'the spirit of the valley' describes the Dao; the phrase 'does not die' refers to its permanence. The sentence 'the spirit of the valley does not die' refers to the constant Dao (常道). *Pin* 牝 [a female] refers to an entity capable of generating things; *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] points to its totality, commonality, and unity. The phrase 'dark female' refers to the *locus* of the generation of all things and affairs." (*Lun Laozi* 论老子 [*On the Laozi*], p. 50)

3) *Mian mian* 綿綿 [silk floss, continuous], as though existent: Continuous and uninterrupted.

   Su Zhe: "*Mian mian* 綿綿 [silk floss, continuous], subtle yet uninterrupted. *Ruo cun* 若存 [as though existent], existent but impossible to see."

4) Inexhaustible: To not tire, to not exhaust.

Contemporary Translation

Empty change does not stop or exhaust—this is subtle maternity. The gate to subtle maternity is the root and source of heaven and earth. It exists continually and uninterruptedly; its functioning is infinite and inexhaustible.

Argument

This section uses concise words to describe the metaphysical, actually existing Dao. (1) Valley is a symbol of the emptiness of the Dao's body, and spirit, a metaphor of the continuous, uninterrupted generative activity of the Dao; (2) the gate of dark femininity and root of heaven and earth illustrate the fact that the Dao is the beginning and source of heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things; (3) "Continuous, as though existent. Use it, it is inexhaustible" describes the ceaselessly generative function of the Dao.

Seven

天長地久。天地所以能長且久者，以其不自生 (1)，故能長生 (2)。是以聖人後其身而身先 (3)；外其身而身存。非以其無私邪？故能成其私 (4)

Heaven lasts and the earth endures. The reason why heaven and earth last and endure is that they were not *zi* 自 [self] *sheng* 生 [generating, to be born, engender, live] (1). That is why they are capable of living long (长生) (2).

And so too the sages put themselves first by placing themselves last (3), they preserve themselves by remaining outside of themselves. Couldn't this be because they lack *si* 私 [self, selfishness, self-concern]? This is how they bring about what concerns (私) them (4).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Not *zi* 自 [self] *sheng* 生 [generating, to be born, engender, live]: this refers to the fact that heaven and earth do not move and function on their own behalf.

   Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (d. 655): "This means that they do not nurture their own life." (*Daodejing kaiti xujue yishu* 道德经开题序诀义疏 [*Topical Introduction, Preface, and Commentary to the Daodejing*]).

   Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "This is because they are not selfishly concerned with their own lives."

2) Living long (长生): means "permanently" (长久) here.

   In the Jinglong era stele edition,[1] the *Cijie* 次解 [*Daode zhenjing ci jie* 道德真经次解 (*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*)], the Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333 version), Kou Caizhi 寇才质 (12th century; dates unknown) version, and Wei Dayou 危大有 (early Ming) version, we find *changjiu* 长久 instead of *changsheng* 长生.

3) Puts themselves first by placing themselves last: it is precisely by placing oneself last that one can gain everyone's love and respect. In the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version, "placing themselves last" is rendered as "withdrawing themselves (退其身)".

1 Tr. note: Reference to the second era name (707–710) of the Tang dynasty emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (d. 710).

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Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: "Those who place others first and themselves last are revered by the world and prioritized as the superior". This refers to the principle of opposites complementing each other. (See Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018), *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛书老子校注 [*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi*])

Shi Deqing remarks: "By not being selfishly attached to oneself in order to place others first, people will rejoice in ceaselessly commending the sage."

Wang Huai 王淮 (d. 2009) comments: "The expression 'placing oneself last' denotes a spirit of modesty, withdrawal, and restraint."

4) Bring about what concerns (私) them: this means completing oneself.

Xue Hui 薛蕙 (d. 1541) comments: "As for the sages lacking self-concern, this means that from the very beginning, they do not have the heart-mind/intention of accomplishing their self-concerns. Their self-concerns, however, are accomplished due to the natural course of the Dao."

Cheng Hao 程顥 (d. 1085) states, 'the words of Laozi manipulatively talk about the world.'[2] I used to believe Cheng's opinion to be true, but if I consider the matter now, I see that he was sorely mistaken. In the case of this chapter as well, if one does not grasp its profound significance, one will end up making the kind of accusations like Cheng Hao's. This chapter essentially refers back to not being concerned with oneself. How could someone who is not concerned with himself "manipulatively talk about the world?"

Contemporary Translation

Heaven and earth are permanent. The reason why they are permanent is because none of their movements and functions are done on their own behalf, which enables them to be permanent.

Therefore, all those who possess the way withdraw into the background, and this is precisely what allows them to gain everyone's love and respect. It is precisely because they leave themselves out of consideration that they are able to preserve their life. Isn't this precisely because they are not self-centered? That is precisely why they can accomplish themselves.

2 Tr. note: See *Er Cheng yishu* 二程遗书 [*Surviving Works of the Two Master Chengs*], *juan* 11 [Volume 11].

Argument

Laozi used the fact that heaven and earth do not operate on their own behalf as a metaphor for the sage's lack of selfish intentions. When the opportunity presents itself, most people in his position would be unable to keep themselves from giving free rein to their own desire to possess things. Laozi's ideal ruler however will still be able to "remain outside of himself" and "place himself last", that is to say, he will not put his own desires first and will avoid prioritizing his own interests. Here we are presented with an extraordinary spirit of modesty.

By not putting one's own desires first ("placing oneself last"), a person can naturally gain everyone's love and respect (thus "putting oneself first"). People who do not privilege their own interests can naturally bring their spiritual life to completion (thereby "preserving themselves"). It is precisely because such people always take others into consideration that they are able to attain an ideal form of life.

Eight

上善若水 (1)。水善利萬物而不爭，處衆人之所惡，故幾於道 (2)。居善地，心善淵 (3)，與善仁 (4)，言善信，政善治 (5)，事善能，動善時 (6)。夫唯不爭，故無尤 (7)。

The highest good[1] to be like water (1). Water is good because it benefits the ten thousand things without engaging in contending. Because it abides in places loathed by the multitudes, it *ji* 几 [almost, approach] the Dao (2). Residing in a good place, its heart (心) excels in *yuan* 渊 [deep, depth] (3), its *yu* 与 [together, giving] (4) excels at *ren* 仁 [humaneness], its words excel at trustworthiness, its *zheng* 政 [governance] excels at *zhi* 治 [regulating, ordering, governing] (5), its affairs excel in capability, its motions excel in *shi* 时 [time, moment, season, timeliness] (6). Only because it does not contend is there no *you* 尤 [wrongdoing, reproach] (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) The highest good to be like water: "The nature of the highest good persons beings resembles that of water." (Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comment).

   Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994) notes: "Water, the female, and the infant are Laozi's most famous symbols for the Dao. These symbols are essentially ethical in nature, and not metaphysical. It is highly intriguing that for the ancient Indians, water was related to creation. For the Greeks on the other hand, it was a natural phenomenon. By contrast, ancient Chinese philosophers, both Laozi and Kongzi, preferred to approach water as a source of moral guidance. Generally speaking, these different approaches each gave shape to a distinguishing feature of Indian, Western, and Chinese culture."

2) *Ji* 几 [almost, approach] the Dao: here *ji* 几 means *jin* 近 [close to, near].

   Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998) comments: "The following seven phrases are all descriptions of the virtues associated with water, while at the same time actually referring to human beings of the highest good. In

1 Tr. note: *Shan* 善 means "good" in a mundane sense, such as "good at" or "a nice (善) person." It is completely different from the "Good" Plato describes.

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other words, this passage represents the sage as an embodiment of the Dao, with the help of the image of water."

3) *Yuan* 渊 [deep, depth]: a description of calmness and tranquility.

4) Its *yu* 与 [together, giving] excels at humaneness: *yu* 与 refers to interacting with other human beings.

5) Its *zheng* 政 [governance] excels at *zhi* 治 [regulating, ordering]: being able to achieve great things through good governance. In the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) edition, we find *zheng* 正 [correct, straight, rectify] instead of *zheng* 政 [governance]. These two characters have the same meaning here. The Jinglong era stele edition, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112) version, the Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, the Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version, the Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) version, as well as many other ancient editions render this phrase as we do here.

Zhang Songru remarks: "In ancient texts, the characters *zheng* 政 [governance] and *zheng* 正 were often used interchangeably. In the biography of Lu Jia 陆贾 (d. 170 BCE) in the *Hanshu* 汉书 [*History of the Former Han*] we read: 'The Qin dynasty lost its *zheng* 正.' Here, *zheng* 正 [correct, straight, rectify] is used for *zheng* 政 [governance]. There are many other such examples. In the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions of Chapter 58 of the *Laozi*, the characters *zheng* 政 [governance]in the passage: 'When governance is *menmen* 闷闷 [muffled, gloomy], the people will be *chunchun* 淳淳 [simple, unsophisticated]. When governance is *chacha* 察察 [discerning, meticulous], the people will be *queque* 缺缺 [to lack, deficient, damaged] are all rendered as *zheng* 正 [correct, straight, rectify]'; [which makes it clear that] these two characters are also used interchangeably in the text of the *Laozi*."

Xue Hui 薛蕙 (d. 1539) provided a succinct interpretation of the preceding phrases. He writes: "Conducting oneself without engaging in contending and avoiding a position of superiority while remaining in a lowly place, this is what is meant by 'residing in a good place.' Preserving one's heart-mind and retaining subtlety in an unfathomable profundity, this is what is meant by 'excelling in depth.' Carrying out all-inclusive care (兼爱) and being without self-concern, this is what is meant by 'excelling at humaneness.' When there is proof for what a person says and his words and promises are not broken, this is what is meant by 'excelling at trustworthiness.' When there is tranquility in the governance of the state and the state rectifies itself, this is what is meant by 'excelling at governing'."

6) Its motions excel in *shi* 時 [time, moment, season, timeliness]: its actions excel at grasping the opportunity.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) comments: "In the chapter *Tianxia* 天下 [*All-under-Heaven*] of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], Lao Dan's 老聃 teaching is described in the following way: 'His motions are like water, his stillness is like a mirror, his answers are like echoes.' Sima Qian 司马迁 (d. 86 BCE) describes the teachings of the Daoist school: 'Moving along with the seasons and transforming in response to things.' Both of these descriptions refer to the idea of 'excelling in timeliness.' As a matter of fact, when Laozi uses this expression, he does not mean that the sage is able to adapt himself to temporal changes through his own active efforts, but rather that he does not act and does not undertake anything. The sage himself abides in profound and motionless tranquility and allows the people to act and cease to act out of themselves."

7) *you* 尤 [wrongdoing, reproach]: Means *yuanjiu* 怨咎 [complaint, condemnation] here.

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) remarks: *you* 尤 is an abbreviation of *you* 訧 [fault]. *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: "*you* 訧 means *zui* 罪 [fault, crime]."

Contemporary Translation

The highest good [i.e. most excellent of] human beings resemble water. Water excels at nourishing the ten thousand things and does not contend with them. Because it resides in places everyone detests, it remains closest to the Dao. In residing it excels at choosing the right place, its heart excels at preserving calmness and tranquility, in interacting with others, it excels in sincerity and kindness, in speaking it excels at remaining true to its word, in governing it excels at handling its affairs efficiently, in its dealings it excels at making the most of its strong suits, in its activities it excels at grasping opportunities.

It is only because it has the virtue of not engaging in contending that there will be no condemnation.

Argument

This chapter uses the nature of water as a metaphor for a human personality of the highest virtue. The most distinctive features and functions of water are,

firstly, yielding, secondly, residing in the lowliest of places, and thirdly, nourishing the ten thousand things without contending with them. Laozi believes that a perfect human character should also embody a state of mind of this kind and conduct itself in a similar way; "abiding in places loathed by the multitudes" refers to the fact that a person of this sort is willing to go where others will not venture and willing to do the things others refuse to do. Such a person has a camel-like spirit, remaining steadfast while carrying a heavy burden and enduring humiliation in its lowly station. He will devote all of his abilities to helping others, without competing with others for success, recognition or benefit and profit. This is the meaning behind Laozi's idea of "good because it benefits the ten thousand things without contending."

Nine

持而盈之 (1)，不如其已 (2)；
揣而銳之 (3)，不可長保。
金玉滿堂，莫之能守；
富貴而驕，自遺其咎。
功遂 (4) 身退 (5)，天之道也 (6)。

Holding and filling it (1) is not as good as *yi* 已 [already, to end, finish] (2);

Zhui 揣 [to beat] and *rui* 銳 [sharp, to sharpen] it (3) cannot preserve [anything] for long.

A hall filled to the brim with gold and jade, there is none who can guard it.

When wealth and honor lead to arrogance, one invites disaster upon oneself.

Gong 功 [achievement, result, success] *sui* 遂 [to accomplish] (4) and then *shen* 身 [body, self] *tui* 退 [to withdraw, retire] (5), that is the Dao of heaven (6).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Holding and filling it: holding tight and being replete, denotes a sense of complacency and arrogance.
2) *Yi* 已 [already, to end, finish]: Means *zhi* 止 [to stop] here.
3) *Zhui* 揣 [to beat] and *rui* 锐 [sharp, to sharpen]: Sharpening something by beating it, refers to flaunting one's talents in this context.

   In the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version, we find the character *zhuo* 棁 [stick, cane] instead of *rui* 锐 [sharp, to sharpen]. The Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) edition and other ancient editions have *rui* 锐. In his commentary, Wang Bi writes: "*Rui zhi* 锐之 [sharpening it] makes it sharp." This indicates that *rui* 锐 was also used in the original Wang Bi version.
4) *Gong* 功 [achievement, result, success] *sui* 遂 [to accomplish]: To accomplish success.

   In the Heshang Gong version, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, and various ancient editions, this phrase reads *gongcheng mingsui* 功成名遂 [Success achieved and fame established].

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Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920): "In the *Shang de* 上德 [*Highest Virtue*] chapter of the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*], the *Dao Ying* 道应 [*Responses of the Dao*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*], and in the *Mouzi* 牟子 [*Writings of Master Mou*], this phrase is quoted as '功成，名遂，身退 [accomplishing success, achieving fame, withdrawing oneself]'." (*Du Laozi zhaji* 读老子札记 [*Reading Notes on the Laozi*])

5) *Shen* 身 [body, self] *tui* 退 [to withdraw, retire]: This refers to showing restraint in displaying one's talents.

Wang Zhen 王真 (late Tang, ca. 9th century): "Withdrawing does not necessarily mean abandoning one's position and giving up. It merely means that the person in question wants to accomplish things without claiming ownership." (*Daodejing lunbing yaoyi shu* 道德经论兵要义述 [*Outline of Discussions of Military Affairs in the Daodejing*])

Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994): "A person who has accomplished success should withdraw. Although many recluses called themselves Daoists, their mode of existence was not the same as that of the Daoists. Even in Confucian thought, the concept of withdrawal is not completely absent. Mengzi for instance described the Dao of Confucius as 'withdrawing when it is proper for one to withdraw'."[1]

6) That is the Dao of Heaven: This refers to the regularity of nature. The character *ye* 也 [final particle in assertive nominal sentences] is lacking in current editions and has been added on the basis of the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions.

Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (d. 655): "Heaven is what is self-so (自然)."

Contemporary Translation

Holding tight and being replete are not as good as knowing when to stop.

By flaunting one's talents, one will not remain on top of things for very long.

A hall filled with gold and jade is impossible to guard.

When wealth and honor lead to arrogance, one invites disaster upon oneself.

Maintaining restraint when one has attained success, this is in accordance with the principle of what is self-so.

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1 Tr. note: see *Mengzi* 孟子 [*Writings of Master Meng*] 2A: 2. What Chen writes here is more of an interpretation than a direct quote from the *Mengzi*.

Argument

Usually, when people have the opportunity to attain fame and wealth, they easily become intoxicated by it and others are bound to come running for a piece of the action. In this chapter, Laozi is explaining the disastrous effects of only focusing on how to get ahead without knowing when to take a step back and of being good at contending without knowing when to yield. He urges people to stop before it is too late.

People who lust after power and wealth are often insatiable, people who are conceited and contemptuous are always looking to impress others. This is something we should always guard ourselves against. When wealth and honor lead to arrogance, people often invite disaster upon themselves. This was precisely what happened in the case of Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 BCE). When he became the prime minister at the Qin 秦 court, he was the truest incarnation of wealth, honor, success, and fame, and his illustrious reputation was unparalleled in the world. But in the end he could not avoid ending his life as a prisoner. Before his execution, Li Si told his son: "If only you and I were still leading our yellow dog out of the East gate at Shangcai 上蔡[2] to go and chase after the cunning hare, but how could it be so?" Zhuangzi 庄子 was a master at pointing out the delirious consequences of lusting after success, fame, wealth, and glory. When the king of the state of Chu 楚 invited him to serve as prime minister, he laughed and replied to the king's envoys: "A thousand pieces of gold are of great value and the position of prime minister is an honorable one. But can't you see the ox destined for the sacrifice to heaven and earth? After having been fattened for several years, it is covered with embroidered silk and led into the Great Temple [before being slaughtered]. At this point, do you not think it would rather be a lonely little piglet? But by that time it is already too late!"[3] If we consider the execution of the Marquis of Huaiyin 淮阴[4] and the imprisonment of Xiao He 萧何 (d. 193 BCE),[5] we can see how discerning and visionary Laozi's warnings were!

This chapter gives a description of "fullness (盈)." In this context, "fullness" refers to being filled to the brim and to what is excessive. Complacency and

2 Tr. note: Li Si's hometown.

3 Tr. note: This anecdote can be found in Zhuangzi's biography in the *Shiji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*].

4 Tr. note: Refers to Han Xin 韓信 (d. 196 BCE), one of Liu Bang's 刘邦 (d. 195 BCE) (emperor Gaozu 高祖, founder of the Han dynasty) most accomplished generals who later fell out of favor with the emperor.

5 Tr. note: Counselor to Liu Bang, imprisoned at one point later in life on suspicion of disloyalty to the emperor.

arrogance are both expressions of "fullness" in this sense. If a person persists in such "fullness", he will not be able to avoid his own downfall. That is why Laozi never tired of warning people to not be "full". The Dao for preserving oneself can only be attained by "withdrawing oneself" and avoiding "fullness" after having achieved success and fame.

"Withdrawing oneself" does not at all mean avoiding and getting rid of things, let alone going into hiding without leaving any traces behind. Wang Zhen was exactly right in pointing out that "withdrawing does not necessarily mean abandoning one's position and giving up. It merely means that the person in question wants to accomplish things without claiming ownership." "Withdrawing oneself" means exercising restraint and not showing off. Laozi urges people who have achieved success not to be hoggish or possessive and not to flaunt their talents or treat others aggressively. Obviously, Laozi's notion of "withdrawing oneself" does not call upon people to become recluses, but merely urges them not to inflate their own importance. There is not even the slightest trace of any notion of escaping from the world in Laozi's philosophy. He simply warns people that they should not greedily and jealously guard the outcome of their actions when they have accomplished something or cling to their position without doing anything. Rather, they should restrain their desires and preserve their potential to act.

Ten

載 (1) 營魄 (2) 抱一 (3)，能無離乎？
專氣 (4) 致柔，能如嬰兒乎 (5)？
滌除玄覽 (6)，能無疵乎？
愛民治國，能無爲乎 (7)？
天門 (8) 開闔 (9)，能爲雌乎 (10)？
明白四達，能無知乎 (11)？
[生之畜之。生而不有，爲而不恃，長而不宰，是謂"玄德" (12)。]

Zai 載 [to carry, to be loaded with] (1) *ying* 营 [to nurture] *po* 魄 [*po* soul] (2) *bao* 抱 [to carry in one's arms, embrace] *yi* 一 [one, oneness] (3), can you ensure that it will not depart?

Zhuan 专 [to concentrate] *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] (4) to the utmost of gentleness, can you become like an infant? (5)

By cleansing the *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *lan* 览 [to observe, mirror] (6), can you be without blemish?

By loving the people and governing the state, can you engage in non-action (无为) (7)?

When the heavenly gate (8) opens and closes (9), are you able to act as *ci* 雌 [female] (10)?

When brightness extends in all four directions, are you able to remain unknowing (11)?

[Generating and fostering them. Generating without possessing. Acting without relying. Growing without dominating. These are called the *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] (12).][1]

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Zai* 载 [to carry, to be loaded with]: This is being used as an auxiliary particle here.

Lu Xisheng 陆希声 (d. 895 or 901): "*Zai* 载 [to carry, to be loaded with] is the same as *fu* 夫 [topic marker]. It [marks] the beginning of a sentence." (*Daodejing zhuan* 道德经传 [*Commentary on the Daodejing*]).

1 Tr. note: This portion of the text recurs in Chapter 51, see below

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Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979): "Used in the same way as the character *zai* 载 [to carry, to be loaded with] in the verse 'laughing and talking' (载笑载言) from the *Shijing* 诗经 [*Book of Songs*]. It has approximately the same function as *fu* 夫 [topic marker]."

2) *Ying* 营 [to nurture] *po* 魄 [*po* soul] is the same as *hun po* 魂魄 [*hun* souls].

Heshang gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown): "*Ying po* 营魄 means *hun* and *po* souls."

Fan Yingyuang 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "*Ying po* 营魄 means *hun* and *po* souls."

The *Neiguanjing* 内观经 [*Scripture of Inner Observation*]: "That which moves to operate the body is called the *hun* soul. That which remains immobile to stabilize the body is called the *po* soul."

3) *Bao* 抱 [to carry in one's arms, embrace] *yi* 一 [one, oneness]: Means *he* 合 [close, unite, converge] with *yi* 一 [one, oneness]. In the sentence "therefore the sage embraces oneness and becomes a model for the whole world" from Chapter 22, the expression "embracing oneness" should be understood as "embracing the Dao." In the phrase "the valleys get oneness and are thus full" from Chapter 39, "oneness" refers to the Dao. In this chapter, "embracing oneness" refers to the unification of the *hun* and *po* soul. In turn, this unification conforms to the Dao (In this context, "Dao" implies a sense of fusion and integration).

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "Embracing refers to uniting."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "Oneness refers to the body (身)." (*Laozi zhenggu* 老子正诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*]). Note: the word "body" includes the *hun* and the *po* soul, as an integration of the spirit and the body into one whole.

4) *Zhuan* 专 [to concentrate] *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]: To concentrate the vital force.[2]

Gao Heng (高亨): "in the *Nei ye* 内业 [*Inner Cultivation*] chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*] we read 'By bundling one's vital energy (抟气), [one becomes] something spirit-like (神), and has the ten thousand things complete [in/with oneself].' Yin [Zhizhang] 尹 [知章] (d. 718) comments '*Tuan* 抟 means gather.' The phrase *zhuan qi* 专气 in the *Laozi* means the same as the expression *tuan qi* 抟气 in the *Guanzi*."

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "'Concentrating one's vital energy' means the same as 'bundling vital energy.' In this context,

2 Tr. note: English in the original.

vital energy compromises what would later be called bodily energy (形气) as well as refined energy (精气). Bundling vital energy refers to bringing these two types of energy together. The expression 'the utmost of gentleness' means preserving the original state of vulnerability that a human being has when just born, like that of an infant. This idea is analyzed in a much more detailed manner in the *Gengsang Chu* 庚桑楚 [*Gengsang Chu*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], where it is called 'the guiding thread for preserving life (卫生之经)'." (*Zhongguo zhexue shi xinbian* 中国哲学史新编 [*New Edition of the History of Chinese Philosophy*]).

5) Can you become like an infant?: this means "can you be as full of vigor and balanced in your vital energy as an infant?" The phrases "this is utmost *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy]. [It] screams all day but does not get *sha* 嗄 [hoarse]" in Chapter 55 describe the vigor and balance of an infant's vital energy. In the context of the present chapter however, infancy refers to a horizon which can only be attained through self-cultivation, namely, "[concentrating] vital energy to the utmost of gentleness," thus, the word "like (如)" appears here.

Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907): "The Heshang Gong and Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) editions lack the word 'like (如)' and the sentence remains incomplete. This word only appears in the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, which is in accordance with the ancient editions." (*Laozi pingyi* 老子平议 [*A Discussion of Laozi*], in *Zhuzi pingyi* 诸子平议 [*Dicussions of the Masters*]).

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "Wang Bi's commentary says 'To let oneself go by (任) the vital energy of what is self-so (自然) in order to attain a harmony of the utmost gentleness, would this not allow us to be without desires like (若) an infant?' Since in his commentary Wang expresses the meaning of *ru* 如 [like, as if, according to] by means of *ruo* 若, we can surmise that the character *ru* 如 [like, as if, according to] originally appeared in Wang's version as well. In Chapter 20 it says 'I alone am tranquil (泊), not yet showing any signs, *like* (如) an infant that has not yet laughed.' In Chapter 49 there is the phrase 'the sage takes them all as children,'[3] and Wang Bi comments 'allowing them to be in harmony without desires, *like* (如) infants.' Judging by these examples, it is fair to assume that the character *ru* 如 [like, as if, according to] should occur in the current chapter as well. In the chapter *Dao ying* 道应 [*Responses of*

3 Tr. note: A more literal translation could read "the sage babysits (孩) them."

the Dao] of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] the *Laozi* is quoted as saying 'by concentrating your vital energy to the utmost of gentleness, can you become like (如) an infant?' The *Huainanzi* must have been quoting from the ancient edition. Without the character *ru* 如 [like, as if, according to], this sentence remains incomplete. Amended on the basis of Yu Yue's suggestions and the Fu Yi version."

6) *Xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *lan* 览 [to observe, mirror]: In the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version, this phrase is rendered as *xuan jian* 玄监. Here, the inner depth of the mind is compared with the transparency of a mirror. The word "dark (玄)" refers to the profound ingenuity of the human mind.

Gao Heng comments: "The character *lan* 览 [to observe, mirror] should be read as *jian* 鉴 [mirror], which were used interchangeably in ancient times [...] 'Dark mirror' refers to inner radiance, as a metaphysical mirror which can clarify [all] things. That is the reason behind the expression 'dark mirror.' In the *Xiu wu* 修务 [*Cultivating Effort*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] we read: 'By holding up a dark mirror to the heart-mind, all things become illuminated.' In the [comments on the tetragram] *tong* 童 in the *Taixuan* [*jing*] 太玄 [经] [[*Canon of*] *Supreme Mystery*] there is the phrase 'cultivating one's dark mirror.' I suspect these uses of the term 'dark mirror' originated in the *Laozi*. In the *Tiandao* 天道 [*The Dao of Heaven*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], we read: 'In its stillness, the heart-mind of the sage is the mirror of heaven and earth, it is the looking glass of the ten thousand things.' In this passage the heart-mind is compared to a mirror as well."

Gao Heng and Chi Xichao 池曦朝 (b. 1929): "The character *lan* 览 [to observe, mirror] should be read as *jian* 鉴; *jian* 鉴 is a variant of *jian* 鑑 which means 'mirror' [...] The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version has *jian* 监, which is the ancient version of *jian* 鉴. The ancients used a basin filled with water as a mirror, and because it was used to observe one's own face, it was called *jian* 监 [to inspect, watch]. That is why the character resembles a person opening his eyes and standing next to a water basin. Later on, people no longer understood the original meaning of the word *jian* 监 and replaced it by the character *lan* 览." (*Shilun Mawangdui Hanmu zhong de boshu Laozi* 试论马王堆汉墓中得帛书老子 [*A Tentative Discussion of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi found in the Han-dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui*], *Wenwu zazhi* 文物杂志 [*Cultural Relics*], 1974, vol. 11).

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004): "Laozi spoke of 'for the Dao' [Chapter 48] and went on to establish an intuitive method. He argued that a person can directly apprehend the origin of the universe. The expression 'dark mirror' denotes this form of intuition."

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) notes: "The *Laozi* believes that in order to know the Dao, one must also employ a [distinct form of] 'observation (观)'. As it says in Chapter 1, 'Thus, for constant "*wu* 无 [non-presence, non-being]," one wants to look to its subtlety. For constant "*you* 有 [presence, being]," one wants to look to its fringes'. This is an 'observation' of the Dao. From its (the *Laozi*) perspective, such a form of observation requires a different method. In Chapter 10, it reads, 'By cleansing the dark mirror, can you be without blemish?' This 'dark mirror' is an 'observation (览) of the dark', that is to say, an observation of the Dao. In order to observe the Dao, one must first be 'cleansed.' 'Cleansing' means getting rid of all desires of the heart, which is what is meant by 'daily decreasing. Deceasing and decreasing' [Chapter 48] so that there is no more action, only then will one be able to see the Dao. Seeing the Dao is an experience of the Dao, and this experience constitutes one of the highest spiritual horizons." (*New Edition of the History of Chinese Philosophy*.)

7) By loving the people and governing the state, can you engage in non-action (无为)?: In Wang Bi's version we find *zhi* 知 [to know] instead of *wei* 为 [to act, do, engage in]. The Jinglong era stele version, the Lin Xiyi version, the Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) version, and the Jiao Hong 焦竑 (d. 1620) version have *wei* 为 [to act, do, engage in] here.

Yu Yue: "On the Jinglong era stele from the Tang dynasty this sentence reads 'loving the people and governing the state and engaging in non-action,' the meaning of which sounds better, and thus, this version should be followed. This is precisely Laozi's idea of 'governing through non-action (无为而治).'"[4]

Wang Anshi 王安石 (d. 1086): "'Loving the people' is sustained through loving them by not loving. 'Governing the state' is sustained through governing by not governing. It is precisely because one loves by not loving and governs by not governing that the *Laozi* speaks of non-action." (*Wang Anshi Laozi zhu jiben* 王安石老子注辑本 [*A Collection of Wang Anshi's Annotations to the Laozi*], compiled by Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖 (d. 1994)). Yu's explanation and Wang's annotation fit each other.

8) Heavenly gate: Metaphor for the sensory organs. The various commentators have different explanations for the word "heavenly gate." To

4 Tr. note: see Lunyu 论语 [*Analects*] 15:5.

enumerate a few examples: 1) Heshang Gong: "Heavenly gate refers to the nostrils." 2) Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112): "The heavenly gate is the place where order and chaos and degradation and prospering originate." 3) Lin Xiyi: "The heavenly gate is the principle of natural spontaneity between heaven and earth." 4) Fan Yingyuan: "The heavenly gate refers to the changes of one's state of heart-mind." My modern translation takes the first explanation, interpreting "heavenly gates" as referring to the sensory organs.

Gao Heng: "The ears are the gate(s) of sound, the eyes are the gate of sight, the mouth is the gate of nourishment and speech, the nose is the gate of smell, and all of these were endowed to us by heaven, which is why they are called the heavenly gates. In the chapter '*Tian yun* 天运 [*The Rotations of Heaven*]' of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we read 'If the heart-mind refuses to accept something, the heavenly gates remain shut.' In this context, the term 'heavenly gates' has the same meaning, and refers to the idea that when the head-mind refuses to accept something, the ears, eyes, mouth, and nose are of no use. (Here, 'heavenly gates' has a different meaning than in the following passage from the chapter *Gengsang Chu* of the *Zhuangzi*: 'Coming and going without ever seeing its shape, this is what is called the heavenly gate. The heavenly gate is the same as 'presence (有)' and 'non-presence (无),' and the ten thousand things emerge from 'presence' and 'non-presence.')"

9) Opening and closing: This refers to motion and stillness.

10) Are you able to act as *ci* 雌 [female]: "Acting as the female" refers to abiding in tranquility.

In current editions "acting as the female (为雌)" is rendered as *wu ci* 无雌 [being without the female] because of a typographical error. The Jinglong era stele version, the Fu Yi version, as well as many other ancient editions all have "acting as the female." "Being without the female" is a typographical error and makes no sense. The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version clearly renders this phrase as "acting as the female." This mistake should be corrected on the basis of the Fu Yi and Mawangdui versions.

Yu Yue: "The phrase 'when the heavenly gate opens and closes, can you be without the female' makes no sense. It is an error stemming from the sentences preceding and following this phrase [in which the character *wu* 无 occurs]. Wang Bi writes, 'When the heavenly gate opens and closes, can you act as the female? This means that things will voluntarily obey him/her and his/her dwelling place will become peaceful by itself.' Here we see that the Wang Bi version correctly renders this phrase as 'acting as the female.' Heshang Gong comments, 'One should cultivate oneself

as the female, with tranquility and delicacy.' Here no mention of 'being without the female' is made either. This is how we know that the character *wu* 无 was a copy mistake which should be corrected on the basis of the Jinglong era stele version."

11) When brightness extends in all four directions, are you able to remain unknowing?: The Wang Bi version has "acting (为)" instead of "knowing (知)." The Heshang Gong version as well as many other ancient editions have "knowing." This is amended on the basis of the Heshang Gong version.

Yu Yue: "In the Jinglong stele from the Tang dynasty, this phrase reads 'when brightness stretches in all four directions, are you able to remain unknowing?' the meaning of which sounds better, and thus, this version should be followed."

12) Generating and fostering them. Generating without possessing. Acting without relying. Growing without dominating. These are called the *xuan de* 玄德 [dark; virtue] 生之畜之。生而不有，爲而不恃，长而不宰，是谓玄德: in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version this passage is rendered as "Generating and fostering them. Generating without [*fu* 弗 instead of *bu* 不] possessing. Growing [长] without dominating. These are called [*wei* 胃 instead of *wei* 谓] the dark virtues." These phrases recur in chapter 51. I suspect they appear here as a result of being misplaced.

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970): "The passage starting from 'Generating and fostering them' does not fit in with the rest of the text [...] These are all sentences from Chapter 51." (*Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*].

Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921): "Daoism can be employed in a democratic state. That is why the *Laozi* speaks of 'growing without dominating,' of '*wu* 无 [negate, non-] *wei* [action, doing],[5] and thereby *wu* 无 [negate, non-] not *wei* [action, doing]' [Chapter 37]. States ruled by a monarch have never been able to put Daoism to use. The Huang-Lao Daoism of the Han period merely superficially inherited Daoism. Haven't only the Confucian teachings proven to be an efficient instrument for the ruler? The Legalist teachings of Shen Buhai 申不害 (d. 337 BCE) and Han Feizi 韩非子 (d. 233 BCE) on the other hand served to bring relief in times of defeat." (*Laozi Daodejing pingdian* 老子道德经评点 [*Punctuated and Annotated Edition of Laozi's Daodejing*]).

5 Tr. note: *Wu wei* 无为 is often translated as "non-action," "non-assertive action," "doing things noncoercively."

Contemporary Translation

The spiritual and the physical are united, are you able to avoid separating them?

By concentrating your vital energy to the utmost of gentleness, can you reach a state resembling that of an infant?

By ridding yourself of distractions and entering into deep contemplation, can you become flawless?

In loving the people and governing the state, can you behave naturally and without acting?

When your senses come in touch with the outside world, can you preserve your tranquility?

When you completely comprehend everything in all four directions, can you do so without scheming?

[Growing all things and nurturing them. Growing without becoming possessive, fostering without relying. Leading without dominating. These are the most profound of "virtues" (德).]

Argument

This chapter focuses on the practice of self-cultivation.

"The spiritual and the physical are united, are you able to avoid separating them?" This means that a healthy life should unite the physical and the spiritual without one-sidedly attaching importance to either one of them. "Embracing oneness" means embracing the Dao, namely, bringing physical and spiritual life into a supreme state of harmony.

"Concentrating one's vital energy to the utmost of gentleness" means concentrating vital energy to the highest dimension of gentleness. Such "gentleness of vital energy" is an extreme form of mental tranquility.

"Cleansing the dark mirror" means purifying oneself of distracting notions, ridding oneself of delusions, and turning inward to observe the original radiance of the heart-mind.

These forms of practical self-cultivation discussed by Laozi differ from yogic exercises. The purpose of yoga is to become detached from oneself and from one's external surroundings. Laozi on the other hand emphasizes the importance of self-cultivation. When the self has been cultivated, the remaining surplus can be used to extend [one's focus] to love the people and govern the state.

In addition, it is possible that the sequence of sentences in this chapter became scrambled. On the basis of a passage such as "by cultivating it in oneself" "cultivating it in all-under-heaven" (Chapter 54), we can infer that the order of the sentences might be reconstructed as follows:

When the spiritual and the physical embrace oneness, are you able to avoid separating them?

By cleansing the dark mirror, can you be without blemish?

By concentrating your vital energy to the utmost of gentleness, can you become like an infant?

By loving the people and governing the state, can you engage in non-action?

When the heavenly gates open and close, are you able to act as the female?

When brightness stretches in all four directions, are you able to remain unknowing?

By loving the people and governing the state, can you engage in non-action?"

The phrases *wu li* 无离 [without separating] and *wu ci* 无疵 [without blemish] match in their grammatical structure. *Ying* 营 and *po* 魄 describe the physical and the spiritual respectively, which is also the case with the words "cleansing" and "dark mirror," which refer to the highest dimensions of bodily and spiritual cultivation.

"Like an infant" shares the same grammatical structure with "as the female". These phrases also provide us with very similar metaphors. "Infant" refers to "harmony" and "female" refers to "preserving." These two different modes of self-cultivation in the *Laozi* point toward one and the same supreme horizon. The words "infant" and "female" are also mentioned together in the following passage from Chapter 28: "Knowing the masculine while preserving the feminine, be the brook of the world. By being the brook of the world, constant virtue will not desert you, and you will return to infancy."

"Not knowing" and "not acting" also have the same grammatical structure. "Brightness extending in all four directions" while appearing to be "unknowing" constitutes the ultimate outcome of self-cultivation marked by "uniting the spiritual and the physical," "cleansing the dark mirror," "concentrating vital energy to the utmost of gentleness," and "opening and closing the heavenly gate." Additionally, the remaining surplus (余) virtue of "by cultivating it in oneself" naturally flows over into the process of "cultivating it in all-under-heaven" (Chapter 54), in which one "loves the people and governs the state through non-action."

Eleven

三十輻 (1)，共一轂 (2)，當其無，有車之用 (3)。
埏埴 (4) 以爲器，當其無，有器之用。
鑿戶牖 (5) 以爲室，當其無，有室之用。
故有之以爲利，無之以爲用 (6)。

Thirty *fu* 辐 [spokes] (1) together make a *gu* 轂 [hub, wheel] (2), but in *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] lies the function of the wagon (3).

Shan 埏 [to blend something with the help of water] *zhi* 埴 [clay] (4) to make a vessel, but in non-presence lies the function of the vessel.

Chiseling out *hu you* 户牖 [doors and windows] (5) in order to make a room, but in non-presence lies the function of the room.

Therefore, presence (有) benefits, non-presence (无) functions (6).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Fu* 辐 [spokes]: Pieces of wood connected at the center of the wheel and attached to the rim. In ancient times, wheels were made up of thirty spokes, the number thirty being patterned after the number of days in one lunar month.
2) *Gu* 轂 [hub, wheel]: Round hole at the center of the wheel where the axis is inserted.
3) In *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] lies the function of the wagon: Only when there is an empty space at the center of the wheel hub can a wagon function. "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" refers to the empty space at the center of the wheel hub.
4) *Shan zhi* 埏埴 [to blend sth. with the help of water; clay]: *Shan* 埏 means blending, *zhi* 埴 means clay (Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comment). This means to make household utensils with potter's clay.

   Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970): "The character *shan* 埏 does not occur in the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*]. On the basis of the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version it should be rendered as *shan* 挻 [long, bring about, to knead], which in turn is a replacement for *tuan* 抟 [to roll up into a ball, to bundle]. [...] In the *Shuowen* we read '*Tuan* 抟 means *huan* 圜 [to encircle] with the hands.' This seems a rather appropriate explanation. In the *Fengsu tong*[*yi*] 风俗通 [义]

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[*Comprehensive* [*Meaning*] *of Customs and Habits*] it is written, 'It is commonly claimed that when heaven and earth had just come into being and there were no people yet, the goddess Nüwa 女娲 kneaded human beings out of clay.' *Tuan tu* 抟 土 [to knead out of clay] has the same meaning as *tuan zhi* 抟埴."

5) *Hu you* 户牖 [doors and windows]: Doors and windows.

6) Presence (有) benefits, non-presence (无) functions: "Presence (有)" brings benefit to people and "non-presence (无)" allows it to function. According to Wang Bi's commentary, the benefit that "presence" provides people can only be displayed when it works in coordination with "non-presence." ("Presence becomes beneficial when it relies on non-presence in functioning").

Wang Anshi 王安石 (d. 1086): "The reason why 'non-presence' can function in the world is because there are ritual regulations, music, punishments, and [rules of] government. Discarding a wagon wheel's spokes or discarding the world's ritual regulations, music, punishments, and [rules of] government in order to find the function of 'non-presence' would be foolish indeed." Note: here Wang Anshi offers a critique of the disregard for the fact that "presence benefits" in [speaking of] "non-presence functions."

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "Laozi explains 'benefit' and 'function' by means of the 'presence' and 'non-presence' [which characterizes] utensils. Presence and non-presence generate each other, benefit and function realize one another."

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "The Dao discussed in the *Laozi* is the unity of presence and non-presence. Accordingly, although the Dao is mainly characterized by non-presence, this does not entail a neglect of presence. Actually, it [the *Laozi*] also attaches great importance to presence, even though it does not place priority on it. In Chapter 2 of the *Laozi* we read '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] generate each other.' In Chapter 11 it is written: 'Thirty spokes put together make a wheel, but in non-presence lies the function of the wagon. Clay is kneaded to make a vessel, but in non-presence lies the function of the vessel. Doors and windows are chiseled out to make a room, but in non-presence lies the function of the room. Therefore, presence brings benefit, non-presence functions.' These passages clarify the dialectical relation between presence and non-presence in an ingenious manner. A bowl or a tea-cup are empty inside, but it is precisely this empty space which allows the bowl and the tea-cup to fulfill

> their function. Rooms are empty, but it is precisely this emptiness which allows them to function as rooms, because how would people be able to get inside if these were filled [with actual things]? The *Laozi* draws the following conclusion from this: 'presence benefits, non-presence functions.' It interprets non-presence as the principal antithetical element." (Quoted in *Laozi zhexue taolun ji* 老子哲学讨论集 [*Collection of Philosophical Discussions of the Laozi*], p. 117).

Contemporary Translation

Thirty spokes come together at the hub of a wheel; it is only because of the empty space in the hub of the wheel that a wagon can function.

Clay is kneaded into utensils; it is only because of the hollow spaces in the utensils that they can function properly.

By cutting out doors and windows one can make a room; it is only because of the empty spaces where the windows and doors are that it can function as a room.

Therefore, "presence" brings people benefit and "non-presence" allows it to fulfill its function.

Argument

In general, people tend to only pay attention to the effects of what is actually there, neglecting the function of emptiness. Laozi offers a few examples to make clear that, firstly, "presence" and "non-presence" are mutually interdependent and serve one another; secondly, that things without form can produce enormous effects, but most people fail to perceive this. Laozi specifically emphasizes the function of this sort of "non-presence."

Laozi gives three examples: the function of a wagon is to transport goods and people, the function of utensils is to contain things, the function of rooms is to be lived in. These are the specific benefits wagons, utensils, and rooms provide to people, thus, "presence benefits." However, if the wagon were to lack an empty space in its wheel hubs where the axis can spin, it would not be able to drive. If utensils were to lack an empty space inside, they would not be able to be filled with various things. If rooms were to be without empty spaces for the windows and doors on all sides where people can go in and exit and where the light can come in, they would be uninhabitable. This clarifies

the function fulfilled by empty spaces, therefore, "non-presence provides function."

In this chapter, the words "presence" and "non-presence" refer to the phenomenal world. In chapter 1, these terms refer to the transcendent world, the noumenal world. As such, we are dealing with two different levels here. Even though [in each case,] the same pair of signs [*you* 有 (presence) and *wu* 无 (non-presence)] was employed, it refers to something different. "Presence" and "non-presence" are words Laozi uses specifically for the dynamic process through which the metaphysical Dao is realized within the emergence of heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things. In this context, "presence" means actual entities and Laozi makes it clear that such entities can only function in coordination with "non-presence" (hollow spaces). His purpose in doing so is not only to prevent people from focusing their attention on and submitting to the concrete forms they perceive in reality, but also to make clear that things complement and develop each other within relations of opposition.

Twelve

五色 (1) 令人目盲 (2)；五音 (3) 令人耳聾 (4)；五味 (5) 令人口爽 (6)；馳騁 (7) 畋 (8) 獵，令人心發狂 (9)；難得之貨，令人行妨 (10)。是以聖人爲腹不爲目 (11)，故去彼取此 (12)。

The five colors (1) blind the eyes (2); the five tones (3) deafen the ears (4); the fives tastes (5) make the mouth *shuang* 爽 [to lose, damage] (6); *chicheng* 馳騁 [to gallop] (7), *tian* 畋 [to cultivate, hunt] and hunting (8) makes the human heart-mind *fa* 发 [to set forth, issue] *kuang* 狂 [crazy, wild, unrestrained] (9); goods that are hard to obtain will cause people's conduct *fang* 妨 [to obstruct, hinder] (10). This is why the sage [lives] for the belly and not for the eyes (11), he lets go of that and chooses this (12).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Five colors: Green, red, yellow, white, black.
2) Blind: A metaphor for being dazzled or overwhelmed.
3) Five tones: *Jue* 角, *zhi* 徵, *gong* 宫, *shang* 商, *yu* 羽.[1]
4) Deafen: Metaphorically speaking, as in impairing a person's sense of hearing.
5) Five tastes: Sour, bitter, sweet, spicy, salty.
6) Mouth *shuang* 爽 [to lose, damage]: Disease of the mouth. The meaning of *shuang* 爽 [to lose, damage] can be extended to cover *shang* 伤 [to injure, wound] and *wang* 亡 [to lose, die]. Here, a metaphor for losing one's sense of taste.

   Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): "*Shuang* 爽 [to lose, damage] means being deprived of."

   Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939): "In the *Shigu* 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*] chapter of the *Guangya* 广雅 [*Expanded Version of the Erya*], volume three, we read '*shuang* 爽 means to lose.' In the poem *Zhao hun* 招魂 [*Summoning the Soul*] from the *Chuci* 楚辞 [*Songs of Chu*] there is the line 'high-seasoned, but not to spoil the taste (厉而不爽些).'[2] Wang [Yi] 王 [逸] (d. 158) notes 'The people of Chu called a broth which has lost its

1 Tr. note: names of the five notes in the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale.

2 Tr. note: Translation by David Hawkes, quoted from *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the 14th Century*, edited by Cyril Birch, New York: Grove Press, 1965, p. 76.

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taste *shuang* 爽 [to lose, damage].' In ancient times, this word was often used as a name for diseases of the mouth. In the *Jingshen* 精神 [*Essential Spirit*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] for example we read 'The five tastes confuse the mouth and bring harm to it.'"

7) *Chicheng* 馳騁 [to gallop]: Freely rushing about, a metaphor for doing as one pleases.

8) *Tian* 畋 [to cultivate, hunt]: To hunt for wild animals.

9) Makes the human heart-mind *fa* 发 [to set forth, issue] *kuang* 狂 [crazy, wild, unrestrained]: The heart-mind becomes unhinged and uncontrollable.

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "I suspect that the character *fa* 发 [to set forth, issue] here is redundant. The phrase 'the heart-mind goes mad (心狂)' is clear enough in itself. If the word *fa* 发 [to set forth, issue] is added to this series of five phrases (令人目盲，令人耳聋，令人口爽，令人心狂，令人行妨) the grammatical parallelism is lost. Blindness, deafness, and insanity are diseases of the eyes, the ears, and the mind respectively, which is why they are often mentioned in one breath in ancient texts." I provide Gao's statements here for further reference.

10) [Cause] people's conduct *fang* 妨 [to obstruct, hinder]: Harmful to a person's character and conduct. *Fang* 妨 [to obstruct, hinder] means to harm or to injure.

11) For the belly and not for the eyes: To seek only to be content without indulging in unrestrained pleasures. Note: the "belly" refers to what is internal, "eyes" to what is external. "Belly" means the self, the word "eyes" indicates things. "For the belly" means "fill *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] belly(s)" "strengthen *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] bones," "for the eyes" means "empty *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] heart(s)" "weaken *qi* 其 [third person pronoun, singular or plural] will(s)" [see Chapter 3]. Yang Zhu's 杨朱 (d. 360 BCE) idea of "valuing life (重生)" corresponds to what is here called [living] "for the belly." His notion of "alienating external things (外物)" corresponds to what Laozi calls "not for the eyes."

Chiang Hsi-Chang [Jiang Xichang] 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "Laozi uses the word 'belly' to represent a simple and quiet form of life. The 'eyes' on the other hand symbolize clever artifice and excessive craving, which, as we read in this chapter, leads to a life of 'blindness [...] deafness [...] insanity [...] and harmful behavior.' This makes it clear that 'for the belly' denotes a life without desire, and 'not for the eyes' refers to a life without excessive desire."

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "The belly is easily satisfied, but the eyes' desires are insatiable. In this context, the eyes are used as a stand-in for all the other four senses: the ears, mouth, the heart-mind, and the body [sense of touch]. Laozi argues that if a person is content to simply fill his stomach, he can avoid becoming blinded and deafened, suffering from a loss of taste, or engaging in harmful behavior."

Lin Yutang 林语堂 (d. 1976): "The 'belly' refers to the inner self,[3] the 'eyes' to the sensible world outside the self." (See *The Wisdom of Laotse*, p. 90).

12) He lets go of that and chooses this: ridding oneself of the temptations of material desires and abiding in a life of peaceful contentment. "That" refers to a life lived "for the eyes", "this" refers to a life lived "for the belly."

Contemporary Translation

The riotous confusion of colors overwhelms the human eye. The various tones impair our sense of hearing. When people gorge on food and drink, they lose their sense of taste. Hunting frantically serves [only] to unhinge the mind. Rare goods cause people's behavior to deviate from the norm. This is why the sages seek only to be content, without giving in to unrestrained pleasures. This is why they rid themselves of the temptations of material desires and abide in a life of peaceful contentment.

Argument

In this chapter, Laozi points towards the harm caused by the desire for material good in civilized life. He witnesses how the upper classes live, desperate for whatever stimulates the senses, set adrift in pursuit after wealth and fame, and engaging in debauchery and lewdness, all of which causes their heart-minds to be disturbed and restless. Thus, Laozi came to believe that a regular life should be lived "for the belly" instead of "for the eyes" and should be directed inwards instead of pursuing the external. As the saying goes, "a thousand chests full of precious silk clothes can provide you with but one warm [body], a whole table stacked with food can bring you but one bellyful." In our physical existence, we should only strive to be content without giving in to unrestrained sensual pleasures.

3 Tr. note: English in the original.

[Living] "for the belly" means arriving at a tranquil and detached form of existence. [Living] "for the eyes" refers to a life spent in greedily pursuing external needs. The deeper a person has cast himself into the vortex of externalization, the longer he will linger on that and forget the way out so that he will become alienated from himself and will feel more spiritually impoverished with every passing day. This is why Laozi urges people to abandon a life of lusting after the temptations of external things and preserve an inner sense of mental contentment in order to safeguard their inborn innocence.

Civilized life in the modern metropolis has caused the masses of common people to strive only after brutish satisfaction and carnal release and the extent of spiritual damage done is truly frightening. Everywhere we can see scenes of moral debauchery. It is impossible to read what Laozi describes in this chapter without sighing deeply.

Thirteen

寵辱若驚 (1)，貴大患若身 (2)。
何謂寵辱若驚？寵爲下 (3)，得之若驚，失之若驚，是謂寵辱若驚。
何謂貴大患若身？吾所以有大患者，爲吾有身，及吾無身，吾有何患 (4)？
故貴以身爲天下，若可寄天下；愛以身爲天下，若可託天下 (5)。

Favor and humiliation *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *jing* 惊 [to frighten, startle, alarm] (1), *gui* 贵 [noble, valuable, to value] *dahuan* 大患 [disaster, calamity, great worry/anxiety] *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *shen* 身 [body, self] (2).

What is the meaning of "favor and humiliation *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *jing* 惊 [to frighten, startle, alarm]"? Favor is *xia* 下 [below, inferior, to submit, surrender] (3), both obtaining it and losing it appear alarming, this is what is meant by "favor and humiliation *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *jing* 惊 [to frighten, startle, alarm]."

What is the meaning of "*gui* 贵 [noble, valuable, to value] *dahuan* 大患 [disaster, calamity, great worry/anxiety] *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *shen* 身 [body, self]"]? The reason why I am greatly worried is that I have a body, if I did not have a body, what worries would I have? (4)

Therefore, value one's body as the world, *ruo* 若 [then] *ji* 寄 [to send, entrust] the world; loving one's body as the world, then *tuo* 託 [to hold in one's palm, entrust] the world (5).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Favor and humiliation *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *jing* 惊 [to frighten, startle]: Being favored and being humiliated both cause people to be alarmed.

   Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown): "Being honored is frightening and so is being humiliated."

   Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): "Favor will always be accompanied by humiliation, honor will always be accompanied by peril. Favor and humiliation are identical, honor and peril are the same."

2) *Gui* 贵 [noble, valuable, to value] *dahuan* 大患 [disaster, calamity, great worry/anxiety] *ruo* 若 [like, as, if, and, but] *shen* 身 [body, self]: Caring for

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one's body (贵身) is the same as cherishing a disaster. Note: this sentence should read "caring for one's body is [the same as] cherishing a disaster" (贵身若大患). The words *shen* 身 [body, self] and *da huan* 大患 switched places because *shen* 身 [body, self] and the word *jing* 惊 [to frighten, startle] in the previous sentence respectively belong to the *zhen* 真 [original, genuine] and *geng* 耕 [plough, take up] rhyme groups, which rhyme with one another.[1]

Wang Chunfu 王纯甫[2] (d. 1547): "The order of the words in this sentence should be 貴身若大患 instead of 貴大患若身. That the characters have switched places is a curiosity in literature. [However,] there are [indeed] several such examples in the ancient language." (*Laozi yi* 老子亿 [*Conjecture about the Laozi*].)

3) Favor is *xia* 下 [below, inferior, to submit, surrender]: Being favored is dishonorable. *Xia* 下 means "base" or "menial" here.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "Ordinary people consider being favored as something honorable, but what they do not realize is that it is disgraceful." He adds: "The phrase 'favor is *xia* 下' means that being favored is a degrading affair. For example, when a person is favored [by their ruler], his/her ruler will dote upon them. Whenever the ruler drinks wine and eats meat [namely, dines], they will be bestowed [the honor of joining the meal]. If this is not the case, then they are proven to not be favored [by the ruler]. Now those who are not favored [by the ruler] stand unyieldingly [without going down on their knees].[3] By comparing the two, we can see that being favored is actually the most degrading affair there is. How could we not call it something base? This is why the text says 'being favored is base'."

In Heshang Gong's version, this phrase reads "*ru* 辱 [humiliate, disgrace] is base."

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1 Tr. note: Simply put, the words were switched to make the first two sentences of this chapter rhyme. Rhyme groups were divisions employed in traditional Chinese rhyme dictionaries (the most famous being Lu Fayan's 陆法言 *Qieyun* 切韵 from 601 CE), which categorized characters on the basis of their tone, rhyme, and the pronunciation of each syllable. These divisions were named after their first entry. For a detailed discussion, see William Baxter, *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology*, Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992, pp. 33–40.

2 Tr. note: Better known as Wang Dao 王道.

3 Tr. note: In ancient China, when a subject received a bestowal from the ruler—even if it was only a piece of meat—it was ritually appropriate for him/her to bow or kneel in order to show the gratitude. In Shi Deqing's time, namely, the Ming dynasty, genuflection was observed in this situation.

The Jinglong era stele,[4] Chen Jingyuan's 陈景元 (d. 1094) version, and Li Daochun's 李道纯 (d. 1306) version have "to be doted on is superior, to be disgraced is base."

4) The reason why I am greatly worried is that I have a *shen* 身 [body, self], if I did not have a body, what worries would I have?: Because the body is the origin of great anxiety, a person should begin by valuing his body in order to avoid such anxiety. Since this statement by Laozi is meant to be cautionary, he is not at all calling on people to reject the body or forget about the body. Laozi's ideas were never about neglecting, rejecting, or forgetting the body. Quite to the contrary, he urges us to value our body.

Sima Guang 司马光 (d. 1086): "When one has a body, there will be anxiety. However, since one already has a body, it should be cared for and loved. Follow the principles of what is self-so in responding to things and affairs, and never give free rein to desire. Do these and it is possible to be without anxiety."

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "Looking down on the body and failing to self-cultivate courts one's own ruin. Thus, an exemplary person is at peace without letting dangers out of sight, he survives without forgetting about [the possibility] of death. In this way, he can be free of anxiety his whole life."

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992): "The 'I' here is a word used by the ruler to refer to himself. This passage means that the reason a ruler is concerned about great disasters is simply because he is selfishly concerned with himself, covets power, and is afraid of losing it. If a ruler were able to avoid being selfishly concerned with himself, what calamities would be there to worry about? The word *ji* 及 has the same meaning as *ruo* 若 [if] here, see the *Jingzhuan shici* 经传释词 [*Explanation of* [*Function*] *Words in the Classics and Commentaries*]."[5]

5) Value one's body as the world, *ruo* 若 [then] *ji* 寄 [to send, entrust] the world; loving one's body as the world, then *tuo* 託 [hold in one's palm, entrust] the world: It is only when a person approaches the world with the same cherishing and loving attitude he displays towards himself that the world can be entrusted to him.

Fan Yingyuan: "Valuing one's body as the world means that one should not disregard oneself and give in to external things. Loving one's body as the world means not endangering oneself in order to solve a severe problem. If one begins by not disregarding oneself or giving in to external

4 Tr. note: Refers to the Jingfu era (892–893) of the Tang emperor Zhaozong 昭宗 (d. 904).

5 Tr. note: A work by the Qing philologist Wang Yinzhi 王引之 (d. 1834).

things, then the world can be entrusted to what is self-so, and each person will be content with what they have. If a person can avoid endangering themselves in order to solve a severe problem, they can reside in the world without any worries."

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001): "This chapter argues that only someone who treats one's own body as precious and cherishes his own life is able to treat others as precious and love and respect their lives. Moreover, only a person of this sort can be safely entrusted with political responsibility for the world."

Contemporary Translation

Being favored and being humiliated both should make you feel frightened and panicked. Care for your body like cherishing a disaster.

What is meant by the idea that being favored and being humiliated should both make you feel frightened and panicked? Being favored is still something menial. When people gain favor, they will feel frightened and restless. When they fall out of favor, they will also feel terrified and confused. This is what is meant by the idea that being favored and being humiliated both should make you feel frightened and panic.

What is meant by the idea of caring for your body like cherishing a disaster? The reason why I am greatly worried is precisely because I have a body. If I did not have this body of mine, what worries would I have?

Therefore, a person who can approach the world with the cherishing attitude he displays towards himself can be entrusted with the world. A person who can approach the world with the loving attitude he displays towards himself can be entrusted with the world.

Argument

In this chapter, Laozi stresses the idea of "caring for oneself (贵身)." In his view, an ideal ruler should first and foremost care for himself and avoid engaging in reckless and rash behavior. In this way, everyone can feel at ease in entrusting him with the enormous responsibility of governing the world.

In the previous chapter the "sage" was described as someone who [lives] "for the belly (为腹)" and not "for the eyes (为目)," and who merely upholds a tranquil life of contentment without striving after physical and material pleasures and giving free rein to his desires. Such a "sage" who lives for the belly instead

of the eyes is able to "not damage or lose himself as a result of favor and humiliation or glory and disaster" (Wang Bi). Only in this way does the sage become able to take on the heavy responsibility of caring for the world.

Laozi starts out by saying that "favor and humiliation both appear alarming." He believes that "favor" and "humiliation" both diminish people's dignity. Being humiliated is obviously detrimental to a person's dignity, but does not being favored also strip one's personal independence and integrity? Psychologically speaking, when people gain favor, they will feel that a special honor has been bestowed upon them unexpectedly and they will become terrified of falling out of favor. As a result, they will be beset by fear and trembling in the face of the one who has bestowed favor upon them and do everything they can to flatter him or her. Consequently, their personal dignity will wither away without them even noticing it. By contrast, someone who has not found favor yet will be able to conduct himself or herself with pride over and against everyone and can preserve his or her personal independence and integrity. That is why Laozi claims that being favored is also something menial and that there is no glory to be found in it ("being favored is 下").

Most people attach too much importance to external favors, humiliations, slander, and praise, which makes it appear as if they are [constantly] faced with great anxiety. Many people even consider these things to be a great deal more important than their own lives. This is why Laozi calls upon us to care for ourselves and to devote as much attention to ourselves as we [normally] do to such anxieties.

The notion of "caring for oneself (贵身)" also appears in Chapter 44. In general, people are rushing after external fame and fortune and fail to cherish themselves. This is why Laozi exclaims in that chapter "Reputation or body, which is closer? Body or property, which is *duo* 多 [more, heavy]." The opposite of caring for oneself is to neglect oneself. In Chapter 26, Laozi reproachfully addresses a ruler who neglects himself (and despises his own life), writing "How could the lord of ten thousand chariots neglect himself [while governing] the world?"

The current chapter has been misinterpreted very often. Previously, most interpreters saw the body or the self (身) as the origin of all anxieties, which is why one should forget about it. A form of thought propagates "caring for one's body or oneself" was misread as one with "forget the body or the self." This distortion was mainly the result of the influence of Buddhism and these interpreters provided strained interpretations of the *Laozi* from a Buddhist perspective. The body and the spirit both make up the sufficient as well as necessary conditions for what makes human beings human and for human existence as such. Some people take the word *shen* 身 to be a synonym for

"physical body," and by adding Neo-Confucian concepts and religious notions to the mix, which look upon the body as something vile, they end up with the notion of "forgetting about one's body."

Let us now consider the statement Laozi makes next: "What is meant by the idea of valuing one's body as much as one attaches importance to great anxieties? The reason why I am greatly worried is precisely because I have a body. If I did not have this body of mine, what worries would I have?" In this play of question and answer the answer provided by Laozi is descriptive, and should not be seen as a value judgement. The crux of his answer should be located in the word "body or self" (身). What Laozi wants to make clear is that the self is the origin of everything, including of great anxieties. According to the context, Laozi clearly indicates that by "caring for oneself," one can also naturally rid oneself of all sorts of external anxieties (which result from [living] "for the eyes", viz., giving in to feelings and pleasure) and can learn to ignore external favors, humiliations, slander, and praise. Only such a person can assume responsibility for the world.

Fourteen

視之不見，名曰“夷”；聽之不聞，名曰“希”；搏之不得，名曰“微”(1)。此三者不可致詰(2)，故混而為一。其上不皦(3)，其下不昧(4)，繩繩兮(5)不可名，復歸於無物(6)。是謂無狀之狀，無物之象，是謂惚恍(7)。迎之不見其首；隨之不見其後。
執古之道，以禦今之有(8)。能知古始(9)，是謂道紀(10)。

[One] looks but does not see, the name is *yi* 夷 [minute, barbarian]; [one] listens but does not hear, the name is *xi* 希 [silent, beg, hope, rare]; [one] gropes but does not get, the name is *wei* 微 [subtle, little, close slightly] (1). These three—cannot be *zhi jie* 致诘 [to convey and to investigate] (2); thus, they are muddled and one. Above it, [it is] not *jiao* 皦 [bright, sparkling] (3); underneath it, [it is] not *mei* 昧 [dark, to conceal] (4). Like a string (5), [it] cannot be named, [it] goes back to no—thing (6). This is called a shapeless shape, a no-thing (无物) figure. This is called *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused] *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad] (7). Approach it—[and you] do not see its head. Follow it—[and you] do not see its back.

Grasp the Dao of old in order to ride today's *you* 有 [presence, having, being] (8). To be able to know the ancient beginning (9), this is called the thread(s) of the Dao (10).

Annotations

1) “*Yi* 夷 [minute, barbarian],” “*xi* 希 [silent, beg, hope, rare],” “*wei* 微 [subtle, little, close slightly]”: These three words are used to indicate that the Dao cannot be grasped through the senses.

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: “Colourless is called *yi* 夷 [minute, barbarian]; soundless is called *xi* 希 [silent, beg, hope, rare]; shapeless is called *wei* 微 [subtle, little, close slightly].”

Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994) writes: “Subtlety is an important characteristic of Tao [Dao] and is more important than its manifestations. The Confucianists, on the other hand, emphasized manifestation. There is nothing more manifest than the hidden (subtle), they said, and a man who knows that the subtle will be manifested ‘can enter

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into virtue.' The Buddhists and Neo-Confucianists eventually achieved a synthesis and said that 'there is no distinction between the manifest and the hidden.'"[1] (*A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 146)

2) *Zhi jie* 致诘 [to convey and to investigate]: To investigate, to look into.

   Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "*Zhi jie* 致诘 [to convey and to investigate] is the same as to imagine and comprehend (思议)."

3) *Jiao* 皦 [bright, sparkling]: Bright.

   The *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] version and the Qiang Siqi 强思齐 (10th century; dates unknown) text read *jiao* 皎 [bright] instead of *jiao* 皦 [bright, sparkling]. The two graphs can be used interchangeably. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] says: "*Jiao* 皦 [bright, sparkling], the whiteness of jade; *jiao* 皎 [bright], the whiteness of the moon."

4) *Mei* 昧 [dark, to conceal]: Dark.

5) Like a string: Describing something tangled and uninterrupted. The particle *xi* 兮 is missing in the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version. It is added here based on the Jinglong steele version, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, and many other ancient texts.

6) [It] goes back to no—thing: The meaning of this is the same as "returning (复归) to their roots" in Chapter 16. *Fu gui* 复归 [to return] is to return to the source. The phrase no-thing (无物) does not refer to an absolute absence but to an entity devoid of form. *Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] is relative to our senses here: no sense can perceive it [the Dao (道)]. The term *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] is used to describe the Dao's imperceptibility.

7) *Hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused] *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad]: As though present, as though absent, flickering and not fixed.

8) *You* 有 [presence, having, being]: refers to concrete phenomena. Unlike in Chapter 1, here, the term *you* 有 [presence, having, being] is not a Laozian term.

9) The ancient beginning: The beginning of the universe, or the starting point of the Dao.

10) The thread(s) of the Dao: The headrope of a fishing net (纲) and the threads of silk (纲纪) of the Dao, that is, the pattern of the Dao.

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1 Tr. note: The quotation is given in *A Source Book*, as coming from Cheng Yi's 程颐 preface to the *Yi zhuan* 易传 [*Commentary on the Book of Changes*].

Contemporary Translation

You look at it but cannot see it, this is called *yi* 夷 [minute, barbarian]; you listen to it but cannot hear it, this is called *xi* 希 [silent, beg, hope, rare]; you grope for it but cannot feel it, this is called *wei* 微 [subtle, little, close slightly].[2] The form of these three cannot be investigated—it is muddled altogether into one. Its top does not appear bright; its bottom does not appear dark. It is uninterrupted like a string and cannot be described. All movement goes back to a state of no object being possible to see. This is a shapeless shape, an objectless form—it is called *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused] *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad].[3] Approach it, and you do not see its head. Follow it, and you do not see its back.

Grasp the pre-existing Dao in order to chariot the current concrete phenomena. The ability to understand the beginning of the universe is called the regulatory laws of the Dao.

Argument

This section is a description of the substance of the Dao.

The metaphysical Dao is different from all empirical phenomena inhabiting our reality. It is not an object possessing a concrete form. It is shapeless, colourless, and soundless. Thus, Laozi says: "You look at it but cannot see it … you listen to it but cannot hear it … you grope for it but cannot feel it …" He also says: "Approach it, and you do not see its head. Follow it, and you do not see its back." All these describe the fact that the Dao cannot be cognized through sense, that it transcends all human sensory perception. It is thus no surprise that Laozi calls it unfathomable ("cannot be investigated").

This Dao, shapeless as it is, cannot be described. That said, even though it transcends sound, colour, name, and appearance, it is not a nothingness. The no-thing (无物) that Laozi speaks about is not nothingness but an indication that the Dao is not a thing in the usual sense of the term. A thing in the usual sense of the term must possess a perceivable form—and the Dao does not.

The Dao is a supersensible entity, described by Laozi using a special method. Laozi uses concepts belonging to the empirical realm to subsequently deny, one by one, their applicability to the Dao. He also dissolves empirical boundaries, thereby expressing the subtle and covert existence of the Dao.

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2 Tr. note: Since Chen quotes the three crucial terms directly from the *Laozi*, I leave them untranslated here. For my interpretation, see the rough translation of the original text above.

3 Tr. note: This term, too, is quoted directly from the *Laozi* text.

Fifteen

古之善爲士者 (1)，微妙玄通 (2)，深不可識。
夫唯不可識，故強爲之容：
豫兮若冬涉川 (3)；
猶兮若畏四鄰 (4)；
儼兮其若客 (5)；
渙兮其若釋 (6)；
敦兮其若樸；
曠兮其若谷；
混兮其若濁；
孰能濁以靜之徐清；孰能安以動之徐生 (7)。
保此道者，不欲盈 (8)。夫唯不盈，故能蔽而新成 (9)。

In ancients times, those who excelled at being *shi* 士 [scholar, soldier] (1), were subtle, mysterious and *xuan* 玄 [dark, profound, abstruse] *tong* 通 [to connect], too deep to fathom.

But only because they remain unfathomable, one strives to describe them:

Yu 豫 [cautious, careful, hesitant, big elephant] *xi* 兮 [metrical particle used for emphasis, to introduce a caesura], as if they were crossing a river in wintertime (3);

How *you* 猶 [hesitant, vigilant, apes], as if they fear their neighbors in all four directions (4);

How *yan* 儼 [solemn, majestic, stern], as if they were guests here (5);

How *huan* 渙 [scattered, supple, to slacken], like thawing [ice] (6);

How sturdy, like an uncarved piece of wood;

How boundless, like a deep valley;

How turbid, like the muddy waters;

Who can remain tranquil within the murkiness and slowly (徐) clear up? Who can move from the rest and slowly grow? (7)

If one preserves this Dao, there will be no desire for fullness (8). It is only because there is no fullness that the worn-out can be renewed (蔽而新成) (9).

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Commentary and Explanation

1) Those who excelled at being *shi* 士 [scholar, soldier]: The word *shi* 士 [scholar, soldier] in Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version is rendered as *dao* 道 in the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] edition as well as in Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version. If we examine the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] (group A), we find that it uses *shi* 士 [scholar, soldier] here, which proves that *shi* 士 [instead of *dao* 道] is closer to the original meaning.
2) *Xuan* 玄 [dark, profound, abstruse] *tong* 通 [to connect]: The Guodian version as well as the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version have *xuan* 玄 [dark, profound, abstruse] *da* 达 [to arrive at, reach].
3) *Yu* 豫 [cautious, careful, hesitant, big elephant] *xi* 兮 [metrical particle used for emphasis, to introduce a caesura], as if they were crossing a river in wintertime: *yu xi* 豫兮 [how hesitant!] expresses hesitation and caution. "As if they were crossing a river in wintertime": a description of great caution, like one would have when treading on thin ice.

   Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "The expression 'crossing a river' was an idiom of the ancients [...] A person crossing a river has to remain watchful and has to advance slowly, thus, the exclamation 'how hesitant!' is used here. The poem *Xiao min* 小旻 from the *Shijing* 诗经 [*Book of Songs*] goes: 'Fearful and cautious, as if [they were] at the edge of an abyss, as if [they were] treading on thin ice.' 'As if [they were] at the edge of an abyss' has the same meaning as 'like treading on thin ice.'"
4) How *you* 猶 [hesitant, vigilant], as if they fear their neighbors in all four directions: the Guodian version and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version have *you* 猷 [to plan] instead of *you* 猶. *You xi* 猶兮 is an expression of vigilance and care. "As if they fear their neighbors in all four directions" describes not daring to act rashly.

   Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "*You* 猶 is a kind of ape or monkey (獮). It describes the fact that someone who excels at being a scholar constantly remains watchful without ever lowering his guard."
5) How *yan* 儼 [solemn, majestic, stern], as if they were guests here: "How *yan* 儼" describes an attitude of prudence and solemnity. In the Wang Bi version, we find *rong* 容 [to contain, tolerate] instead of "guest" (客). This mistake resulted from the resemblance between the two characters. The Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version, the Jinglong era stele version, and the Fu Yi version have *ke* 客. The same goes

for the Guodian and the Mawangdui versions. Amended on the basis of these versions.

6) How *huan* 涣 [scattered, supple, to slacken], like thawing [ice]: The Wang Bi version has "how supple, like ice that is about to melt (若冰之将释)." The Mawangdui version has "how supple, like *ling* 凌 [ice] that *shi* 泽 [to dissolve]" (涣呵其若凌泽). *Ling* 凌 and *bing* 冰 both mean "ice." In the Guodian version this sentence is rendered as 涣兮其若释. By omitting the character *bing* 冰 [ice], the syntactic parallelism with the previous and following sentences is preserved. This sentence was amended on the basis of Guodian version, which is preferred here.

Liu Xinfang 刘信芳 (b. 1951): "'As if they were guests' refers to their solemnity, 'like thawing [ice]' refers to their being free and easy, 'like an uncarved piece of wood' refers to their simplicity, and 'like muddy waters' refers to their easygoingness (to the fact that they are not stand-offish)." (*Jingmen Guodian zhujian Laozi jiegu* 荆门郭店竹简老子解诂 [*Explanatory Notes to the Bamboo Slips of the Laozi Unearthed in Guodian near the city Jingmen*]).

7) Who can remain tranquil within the murkiness and slowly (徐) clear up? Who can move from the rest and slowly grow?: Who is able to become calm within movement to slowly become purified? Who is able to begin to transform within a state of quietness and make steady progress?

Note: In the Mawangdui A and B versions, the two characters *shu neng* 孰能 [who can] are missing. The texts of the Wang Bi edition and the Guodian version are very similar. A modern translation of the bamboo slips that was written in the dialect of the state of Chu reads: "Who can remain tranquil within the murkiness will gradually clear up (将舍清). Who can move from the rest will gradually grow (将舍生)." *She* 舍 [give up, give alms] and *xu* 徐 [slowly, gradual] were near-homophones and therefore were used interchangeably (see *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹简 [*Bamboo Slips from the Chu Grave at Guodian*], annotated by the editor Peng Hao 彭浩 [1944–]). In the Wang Bi version, a redundant character *jiu* 久 [long] follows after *an yi* 安以.

8) There will be no desire for fullness: The Guodian version has *Bu yu shang de* 不欲尚呈 [not desire to attach importance to exhibition, show-off]. *Cheng* 呈 means "to exhibit" or "to show off."

9) The worn-out can be renewed: Replacing the old with the new.

Wang Bi's version originally had *bu* 不 [not] instead of *er* 而 [and, yet]. The seal-script forms of these two characters look alike, hence this

erroneous substitution. If *bu* 不 [not] is introduced into this sentence, we get the exact opposite meaning and the text stops making sense. Amended here on the basis of Yi Shunding's 易顺鼎 (d. 1920) remarks.

Yi Shunding: "I suspect that this sentence should read 'therefore it can be worn-out yet renewed' (故能蔽而新). *Bi* 蔽 [cover, hide] is a loan character for *bi* 敝 [shabby, worn-out], and *bu* 不 [not] is a mistaken substitution of *er* 而 [and, yet]. *Bi* 敝 [cover, hide] and *xin* 新 [new, newly appear] form an antithesis. The expression 'the worn-out can be renewed' refers to the idea that 'the worn-out becomes new' mentioned in Chapter 22."

Gao Heng: "Yi Shunding's remark is correct. In the seal script, *bu* 不 is written and *er* 而 is written . These characters are similar in form, and hence were mistakenly switched here. In the third part of the chapter *Jian'ai* 兼爱 [*Impartial Care*] in the *Mozi* 墨子 [*Writings of Master Mo*], there is the sentence 'retreat without the drum signal (不鼓而退).' Here *er* 而 is a corruption of *bu* 不, which can support the appearance of the mistake [*bu* 不 as a corruption of *er* 而] in the text of the *Laozi*."

Contemporary Translation

A scholar in ancient times who excelled at practicing the Dao was fine, ingenious, penetrating, and discerning. They were profound and hard to understand. But precisely because they were so hard to understand, we have to force ourselves to describe them:

How careful and cautious, like someone crossing a river in wintertime.

How alert and vigilant, as if they are on guard against being attacked from all sides.

How reserved and stern, as if they are a guest here.

How amiable and kind, like melting icicles.

How honest and unadorned, like unpolished material.

How wide and expansive, like a valley deep in the mountains.

How simple and sincere, like turbid water.

Who is able to become calm within disturbance to slowly become settled? Who is able to begin to transform within a state of quietness and make steady progress? A person who holds fast to these principles will not allow himself or herself to become self-satisfied. It is only because they are not complacent that they can make the old give way to the new.

Argument

This chapter provides a depiction of a scholar who embodies the Dao.

The Dao is subtle, mysterious, profound, and seemingly unfathomable. Accordingly, a scholar who embodies the Dao will also be tranquil, opaque, and impenetrable. Ordinary people have a vulgar constitution and temperament and their minds are poisoned by greed. Zhuangzi 庄子 (d. 286) said, "Those whose desires are deep are shallow in the heavenly endowed talents." Such people are easy to see through. Scholars who embody the Dao on the other hand are subtle and profound, which is why it says here that they are "too deep to fathom."

Laozi attempts to offer a description ("strives to describe") of the features and the personality of a scholar who embodies the Dao. The seven sentences running from "how cautious, as if they were crossing a river in wintertime" to "how turbid, like the muddy waters" depict the bearing and the state of mind of someone who embodies the Dao. This mental outlook resulting from self-cultivation is characterized by qualities such as caution, vigilance, dignity, amicability, honesty, expansiveness, simplicity, tranquility, and elegance.

"Who can remain tranquil within the murkiness and slowly clear up? Who can move from the rest and slowly grow?" What is described here is the practical effort directed towards maintaining tranquility and the spiritual activity of a scholar who embodies the Dao. "Murkiness" and "clarity" and "tranquility" (stillness) and "giving birth" (activity) are two pairs of opposites. They provide descriptions of the dynamic existential processes in which movement transforms into tranquility when it reaches its limit and utmost tranquility in turn becomes movement. "Murkiness" denotes a state of turmoil. When in a state of turmoil, through practicing "stillness" a scholar who embodies the Dao retreats and cultivates the self, remains calm and composed, and enters into a spiritual horizon of clarity. This explains the dynamic existential process in which movement transforms into tranquility when it reaches its limit. While remaining in a prolonged state of serenity and stability ("tranquility"), a scholar who embodies the Dao is also able to set himself in motion and turn to creative activities ("grow"). This explains the dynamic existential process in which utmost tranquility becomes movement.

The description of a scholar who embodies the Dao that Laozi provides here is bound to call to mind Zhuangzi's depiction of a "genuine person" (真人) in the *Da zongshi* 大宗师 [*Great Venerable Teacher*] chapter. By comparing the ideal characters envisaged by Laozi and Zhuangzi, we can see that whereas the former emphasizes tranquility, simplicity, solemnity, and caution, the latter

inclines towards an attitude of carefreeness and detachment, unhurriedness and self-enjoyment. The kind of laid-back and uninhibited personality who "solely goes along with the essential spirit of heaven and earth" we find with Zhuangzi is the latter's own unique creation. The sort of "genuine person" he portrays so vividly as being carefree in mind and magnanimous in appearance and manner appears significantly different from the scholar who embodies the Dao described by Laozi. Laozi's description is simple and straightforward, he provides us with representation of everyday life and parts of the natural scenery, which he uses as his main source of inspiration. Zhuangzi on the other hand employs a romantic writing style and even gives free rein to his literary imagination, thereby bringing forth a unique and remarkable sort of humanist spirit.

Sixteen

致虛極，守靜篤 (1)。
萬物並作 (2)，吾以觀復 (3)。
夫物芸芸 (4)，各復歸其根。歸根 (5) 曰靜，靜曰 (6) 復命 (7)。復命曰常 (8)，知常曰明 (9)。不知常，妄作凶。
知常容 (10)，容乃公，公乃全 (11)，全乃天 (12)，天乃道，道乃久，沒身不殆。

Attain *xu* 虛 [vacuity, emptiness, void] *ji* 极 [ultimate, unsurpassable], preserve tranquility *du* 笃 [sincere, unmatchable] (1).

The ten thousand things *zuo* 作 [to do, make, (a)rise] in unison (2), I observe how they *fu* 復 [to return, resume] (3).

All things so *yunyun* 芸芸 [manifold, numerous] (4), each of them returning to their roots. Returning to the root (5) is called tranquility, tranquility is called (曰) (6) returning to *ming* 命 [life, destiny, mandate] (7). Going back to the mandate is called *chang* 常 [often, constant, constancy] (8), knowing constancy is called *ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence] (9). If one does not know constancy, one acts recklessly, which leads to misfortune.

Knowing constancy is *rong* 容 [to contain, tolerate] (10), tolerance leads to *gong* 公 [common, public, impartial], commonality leads to *quan* 全 [complete, completeness] (11), what is complete is *tian* 天 [heaven, heavenly] (12), what is heavenly is the Dao. The Dao is *jiu* 久 [a long time, to endure], and even the destroy of body will not endanger [it].

Commentary and Explanation

1) Attain *xu* 虛 [vacuity, emptiness, void] *ji* 极 [ultimate, unsurpassable], preserve tranquility *du* 笃 [sincere, unmatchable]: Describes a primordial state of mental tranquility and luminosity. It is only because of selfish desires and external disturbances that the mind becomes inaccessible and unsettled. Consequently, a person must constantly engage in the practice of "attaining vacuity" and "preserving tranquility" in order to thereby recover clarity of the heart-mind. "Vacuity (虛)" describes a condition of a luminous state of heart-mind and metaphorically expresses the absence of prejudices. *Zhi* 致 [attaining, accomplishing]

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means to extend. *Ji* 极 [ultimate, unsurpassable] and *du* 笃 [sincere, unmatchable] have the same meaning and both refer to a limit or to an apex.

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "Attaining vacuity and preserving tranquility does not imply forsaking all bonds with [the world of] things and people. When the ten thousand things cannot upset the original state of my heart-mind, this is what is meant by the utmost of vacuity and tranquility."

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "The method of 'for study' (Chapter 48) discussed by the *Laozi* is primarily about 'observing (观).' It says 'attain the ultimate point of vacuity and preserve tranquility to the utmost. The ten thousand things rise in unison, I observe how they return.' In order to 'observe,' one must look at the original countenance of things without being influenced by emotions or desires, hence 'attain the ultimate point of vacuity and preserve tranquility to the utmost.' In other words, only if a person preserves his inner tranquility will he be able to know things as they are."

Note: for what is rendered here as "attain the ultimate point of vacuity and preserve tranquility to the utmost" (致虚极，守靜笃), the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version has "the utmost of vacancy is constancy, holding the middle ground is sincerity (至虛，恒也；守中，笃也)." The expressions "holding the middle ground" and "attaining the ultimate point of vacancy" run parallel, since "the middle ground" and "vacancy" both refer to a harmonious state of the heart-mind (see my text *Cong Guodian jianben kan 'Laozi' shangren ji shouzhong sixiang* 从郭店简本看《老子》尚仁及守中思想 [*The Notions of 'Esteeming the Humane' and 'Holding the Middle Ground' Seen from the Perspective of the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]).

2) *Zuo* 作 [to do, make, (a)rise]: The movement of growing and generating.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "*Zuo* 作 [to do, make, (a)rise] refers to movement. The growth of plants and the perception of animals are both [instances of] movement."

3) *Fu* 复 [to return, resume]: To go back, the circular motion of moving back and forth.

Wu Cheng remarks: "*Fu* 复 [to return, resume] means returning. When things grow, they go from tranquility to motion. Therefore, going back to the original tranquility is called 'returning.' The vital energy of plants is stored underneath, and the composed heart-mind of animals remains silent internally."

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004): "The universe is always in motion and everything is constantly in a state of transformation. But what is the law governing such transformation? If we grant that there is some sort of constancy within change, then exactly what sort of constancy are we dealing with here? According to the Chinese philosophers (哲人), the lawfulness (常 ['constancy']) governing change is that of recurrence (反复). They believed that everything transforms in accordance with the law of recurrence. But what is recurrence? Simply that when a certain thing evolves in a particular direction until it can go no further in its transformations, it will reverse into its opposite, and so on without ever ending. Things emerge from non-presence,[1] but once present, they gradually become saturated and further evolve until reaching the zenith, at which point they start to wither and degenerate, and ultimately end up perishing. But the end bears another beginning, and new things will come forth again. All things go from growth to decline, and this is called *fan* 反 (returning). At the utmost point of decline, a new beginning emerges from the end [of declining], and this is what is called *fu* 复 [resuming]. 'Returning (反)' means 'negating.'[2] 'Resuming (复)' in this sense is precisely the antithesis of the antithesis, or in other words, the negation of the negation. (However, in Western philosophy, the so-called 'negation of the negation' refers to the synthesis of a thesis and an antithesis. By contrast, in Chinese philosophy, 'resuming (复)' mainly has the sense of rejuvenating and starting anew instead of denoting a [final] synthesis. In this sense, 'resuming (复)' differs from what is called the negation of the negation in Western philosophy.) The constant movement of returning and resuming, this is the law governing the transformation of things."

4) All things so *yunyun* 芸芸 [manifold, numerous], each of them returning to their roots: The word *yunyun* 芸芸 [manifold, numerous] is often used to describe the luxuriant growth of vegetation.

Note: In the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version, this sentence reads: "天道员员，各复其堇（根）(the heavenly Dao is *yuan yuan* 员员 [numerous, revolving],[3] always returning to its *jin* 堇 [root])." The phrase 天道员员 refers to the cyclical movement of the heavenly Dao. I will provide a number of commentaries here for reference.

1 Tr. note: What is meant here is that things emerge without *you* 有 ("presence").

2 Tr. note: In modern Chinese, the infamous triad of "thesis", "antithesis", and "synthesis" routinely ascribed to Hegel is rendered as *zheng* 正, *fan* 反, *he* 和.

3 Tr. note: the most common reading of the character 员 is *yuan*, meaning "round."

Zhao Jianwei 赵建伟 (b. 1957) comments: "The Mawangdui version has *tianwu* 天物 [heavenly things] instead of *tiandao* 天道 and current editions have *fu wu* 夫物 [now as for things]. The *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] (*Zai you* 在宥 [*Letting Things Be*] chapter) and the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*] (*Shang li* 上礼 [*Highest Rituals*] chapter) have 'the ten thousand things (万物)' instead. I suspect that *tiandao* 天道 [Dao of heaven] is correct. *Yun* 员 has the same meaning as *yun* 运 [to revolve]. (In the first part of the chapter *Fei ming* 非命 [*Against Destiny*] of the *Mozi* 墨子 [*Writings of Master Mo*]), we find *yun* 运 used for *yun* 员 in the sentence 譬犹运钧之上而立朝夕者也 [similar to trying to ascertain the directions of sunrise and sunset by looking at the revolutions (*yun* 运) of a potter's wheel]). *Yun yun* 员员 means 'endlessly revolving.' Here it refers to the cyclical movement of the heavenly Dao." (*Guodian zhujian 'Laozi' jiaoshi* 郭店竹简《老子》校释 [*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Guodian Laozi Silk Manuscripts*], volume 17 of *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 [*Research in Daoist Culture*]. References to Zhao Jianwei's work in what follows also refer to this book.)

Liu Xinfang 刘信芳 (b. 1951): "*Tiandao yunyun* 天道员员 means *tiandao yuanyuan* 天道圆圆 [the way of Heaven goes around and around], which indicates that the *Laozi* already realized that the development of things follows a cyclical and circular regularity." (*Jingmen Guodian zhujian Laozi jiegu* 荆门郭店竹简老子解诂 [*Explanatory Notes to the Bamboo Slips of the Laozi Unearthed in Guodian near the city Jingmen*]).

Wei Qipeng 魏启鹏 (b. 1942): "*Yun* 员 [round] is an old form of *yuan* 圆 [round]. In the *Tianwen xun* 天文训 [*Teachings on the Heavenly Patterns*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] we read 'The Dao of heaven is called round (*yuan* 员), the Dao of the earth is called square.' In the *Yuan dao xun* 原道训 [*Lessons on the Original Dao*] chapter of the same book there is also the following sentence: 'What is round (*yun* 员) constantly revolves [...] it is the natural tendency (势) of things.' *Yun yun* 员 员: denotes an endless circular and cyclical movement, which is the basic import of the cycles of the heavenly Dao." (*Chujian 'Laozi' jianshi* 楚简《老子》柬释 [*Selective Commentary on the Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*].)

Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植 (b. 1947): "I suspect the character *yun* 员 [round] is interchangeable for *yun* 运 [to revolve] here. In the second part of the chapter *Fei ming* 非命 [*Against Fate*] of the *Mozi* 墨子 [*Writings of Master Mo*] we read 若言而无义, 譬犹立朝夕于员钧之上也 [If language lacks a standard, it is similar to trying to ascertain the directions of sunrise and sunset [by looking] at the revolutions (员) of a potter's wheel]. In his

Mozi xiangu 墨子闲诂 [*Leisurely Notes on the Mozi*], Sun Yirang 孙诒让 (d. 1908) remarks: 'In the previous chapter, *yun* 员 [round] is rendered as *yun* 运 [to revolve], since these words are similar in sound and meaning.' As such, *yun* 员 [round] *yun* 员 [round] can be understood as meaning 'cyclically revolving' (循环的周转, or in short, 环周). The words 'heavenly Dao' are not mistakes, but rather refer to the cyclical operations of the heavenly Dao." (*Guodian zhujian Loazi shixi yu yanjiu* 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*An Analysis and Investigation into the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*], p. 154.)

5) Returning to the root: Returning to the origin.

Fan Yingyuan: "Returning to the root means going back to the vacuity and tranquility of the heart-mind in its original state."

6) Tranquility is called (曰): Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 240) and Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) versions have *shi wei* 是谓 [this is called]. This is amended on the basis of the Jinglong era stele version, the *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] versions, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, and all other ancient editions in order to preserve the consistency with the preceding and following phrases.

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939): "All editions have 'this is called' instead of 'tranquility is called,' which does not fit in with the rest of the text." (*Laozi jijie* 老子集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Laozi*]).

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) (d. 1974): "several editions have 'tranquility is called,' which is correct. In Chapter 25 there is the passage: 'Forced to name it, [I] say *da* 大 [great], *Da* 大 [great] means *shi* 逝 [to pass]. *Shi* 逝 [to pass] means *yuan* 远 [distant, far]. *Yuan* 远 [distant, far] means *fan* 反 [reversal, to return],' which runs parallel with the sequence in this chapter 'returning to the root is called tranquility, tranquility is called going back the mandate, going back to the mandate is called constancy, knowing constancy is called clarity.' This can serve to corroborate the fact that 'this is called' was mistakenly put in the place of 'tranquility is called.'"

7) Returning to *ming* 命 [life, destiny, mandate]: Going back to the origin.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "*Ming* 命 [life, destiny, mandate] is the *zixing* 自性 [self-nature] of human beings."

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "This return is one to the true origin of one's life. That is why the text says 'returning to the mandate.'"

Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112): "The mandate is the [most] subtle aspect of human nature (性). The latter is something which can still be put into words, but the mandate is beyond language." Note: Fan Yingyuan calls Su Zhe's interpretation into question and makes the following critical

remarks: "If we read Laozi's scripture, we see that it only discusses the heart-mind, and never human nature. So why does Su repeatedly invoke the term 'human nature' in his discussion of the *Laozi*?" Laozi's notion of "returning to the mandate" strongly influenced the Neo-Confucian concept of "returning to human nature (复性)." But in the present context, the idea of "returning to the mandate" as returning to one's original nature merely refers to going back to primordial vacuity and tranquility.

Lu Yusan 卢育三 (b. 1926): "Concerning the notion of *ming* 命, we read in the *Zuozhuan* 左传 [*Commentary of Zuo*] in the section '*13th year of the reign of Duke Cheng of Lu* (鲁成公)': 'The central vital energy (*zhongqi* 中气) [balanced vital energy]) the people receive from heaven and earth is called *ming* 命.' In the *Zhongyong* 中庸 [*Doctrine of the Mean*] from the *Liji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*] it says: 'What is *ming* 命 [mandated] by heaven is called *xing* 性 [human nature].' *Ming* 命 is that which allows all things to exist, live, and grow (生). In Chinese philosophy the concepts *ming* 命 [mandated] and *xing* 性 [human nature] are basically identical in content. The difference is that *ming* 命 [mandated] is located on the level of heaven, whereas *xing* 性 refers to [specific] entities (物). In this chapter of the *Laozi*, *ming* 命 designates the Dao of the origin of ceaseless creation. 'Returning to the mandate' means going back to origin of the ceaseless creation of the ten thousand things." (*Laozi shiyi* 老子释义 [*An Interpretation of the Laozi*].)

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001): "Laozi's notion of 'returning (复归)' later came to be closely connected to the idea of 'returning to human nature (复性)' in the Neo-Confucianism of the Song period. However, generally speaking, what is distinctive about this notion of Laozi is that he believes that there is an eternal and indestructible noumenal Dao at the origin of individual phenomena. In other words, while each individual entity is in itself finite and incomplete, the origin of its existence is firmly grounded in an unlimited and consummate 'Dao,' and because all individual entities maintain a relation of continuity with the Dao similar to the relation between the root of a tree and its branches, they are able to overcome their own finitude and incompleteness by returning from the branch to the root. This is what the notion of 'returning' is essentially about.

The idea of 'returning' gave rise to two distinct thoughts in the history of Chinese philosophy. Firstly, it came to be seen as a return oriented towards one's inner subjectivity and agency. The heart-mind of human beings is originally pure and perfect, but comes to be disturbed by all sorts of acquired desires and forms of knowledge. Consequently, a person

must abandon desire and return to this original purity and perfection. The discussion of 'returning to human nature' by the Tang philosopher Li Ao 李翱 (d. 841) and his Neo-Confucian successors in the Song period is representative of this line of thought. Arguably, Chinese Buddhist and Daoist theories of self-cultivation are basically also grounded in this position.

Secondly, temporal change from the past to the present constitutes a 'return' from a historical perspective. [This thought] regards the 'past' as a world of supreme virtue in which the 'Dao' was completely realized and the 'present' as an imperfect age of degeneration and decline. Returning from an imperfect 'now' to a consummate 'antiquity' is what is meant by the notion of 'returning to antiquity (复古)' or 'venerating antiquity (尚古).' The best example of this approach can be found in the Confucian belief that the age of Yao 尧, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, and Tang 汤 was one populated by actual sages and in the Confucian yearning to return to the Dao of the sages of old.

Laozi's notion of 'returning' actually encompasses both of these approaches. What we should particularly bear in mind is that he was the first to disclose the archetype for both directions in the idea of 'returning.'" (*Laozi* 老子, translated by Chen Guanxue 陈冠学 [d. 2011]).

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "Laozi employs the phrase 'returning to the root' to provide a definition of 'tranquility (静)' while also using the expression 'returning to the mandate' to describe 'tranquility.' If *bing zuo* 并作 [arising in unison] connotes 'movement,' then the words *gui* 归 and *fu* 复 belong to the realm of 'tranquility.' It is precisely in this realm of 'tranquility' that new life can be engendered, which is what is meant by the phrase 'tranquility is called returning to *ming* 命 [life, destiny, mandate].'"

8) *Chang* 常 [often, constant, constancy]: Refers to the eternal regularity underlying the movement and transformation of the ten thousand things.

Zhang Dainian: "The Chinese philosophers all considered change to be a fundamental reality. In addition, they also believed that change is properly ordered. Change is not chaotic, but rather occurs according to an unchanging principle. The unchanging principle governing change is called constancy (常). Constancy refers to the unchangeable within change, and change itself also constitutes a form of constancy. The concept of constancy was first developed by Laozi."

9) *Ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence]: All movements and transformations of the ten thousand things follow the regularity of cyclical

repetition. The knowledge and understanding of this regularity is called *ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence].

Chen Yang 晨阳 (dates unknown) notes: "When it comes to the relation between observation and knowledge, Laozi thinks that sensible knowledge should be elevated to the level of rational knowledge, and this elevation of sensibility to reason is called *zhi* 知 [to know] or *ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence]."

10) *Rong* 容 [to contain, tolerate]: tolerant, encompassing.

Wang Bi: "This means that there is nothing it does not contain."

11) *Quan* 全 [complete, completeness]: Covering all. Wang Bi's version has *wang* 王 [king] instead of *quan* 全 [complete, completeness]. Wang notes, "This means there is nothing where it is not present." Obviously, the original character does not read *wang* 王 [king], since that would make the text incomprehensible. That current editions have *wang* 王 [king] instead of *quan* 全 [complete, completeness] is a mistake resulting from damage to the text. It is amended on the basis of the comments provided by Lao Jian 劳健 (d. 1950).[4]

Lao Jian: "'Knowing constancy is *rong* 容 [contain, tolerate], tolerance leads to *gong* 公 [common, public, impartial]': Here *rong* 容 [contain, tolerate] rhymes with *gong* 公 [common, public, impartial]. 'What is heavenly is the Dao (道). The Dao is *jiu* 久 [a long time, to endure]: Here *dao* 道 [the Dao] rhymes with *jiu* 久 [a long time, to endure]. It is only in the phrases 公乃王，王乃天 that we find a lack of rhyme between *wang* 王 [king] and *tian* 天 [heaven, heavenly]. The meaning of *wang* 王 [king] is in itself dubious enough [in this context]. [...] In these two phrases, the character *wang* 王 [king] is in all likelihood a corruption of *quan* 全 [complete, completeness]. [If the text is] '公乃全，全乃天', then *quan* 全 [complete, completeness] rhymes with *tian* 天 [heaven, heavenly]. This is what Wang Bi means in his commentary when he writes '[there is nothing where] it is not present.' The version of Laozi in the Jinglong era stele has *sheng* 生 [generate, live, exist, grow] in place of the character *wang* 王 [king] in current editions, which is probably also a damaged version of the character *quan* 全 [complete, completeness]. As the character *sheng* 生 [generate, live, exist, grow] bears a very close resemblance to *quan* 全 [complete, completeness], this may serve as a proof for the [assumed] physical decay." (*Laozi guben kao* 老子古本考 [*An Investigation into the Ancient Editions of the Laozi*].) Lao is right. This mistake in received

4 Tr. note: Also known as Lao Duwen 劳笃文.

versions has been passed on long enough and should be amended on the basis of Lao's remarks.

12) *Tian* 天 [heaven, heavenly]: Refers to heaven as a natural object, or serves as an alternative designation of *ziran* 自然 [self-so, spontaneous, natural].

Contemporary Translation

The practice of attaining vacuity and preserving tranquility is done to a supreme and unsurpassable level.

The ten thousand things flourish and grow, I see through the principle of alternation and circulation.

The ten thousand things are endlessly diverse, each of them returning to its origin. Returning to the origin is called tranquility, tranquility is called going back to the source. Going back to the source is an eternal regularity, gaining knowledge of eternal regularity is called clarity. Failing to know eternal regularity and acting recklessly will lead to trouble.

A person who is able to understand the constant Dao can accommodate all there is, and by accommodating all there is one can become unperturbed and impartial. By being unperturbed and impartial, a person will be able to reach beyond all confines. Only by reaching beyond all confines can a person be in accordance with what is self-so, and only by being in accordance with what is self-so will one conform to the Dao. Only by embodying the Dao will one be able to endure and avoid peril for as long as one lives.

Argument

This chapter emphasizes the practice of attaining vacuity and preserving tranquility. Attaining vacuity means putting a hold to the operations of intelligence until one reaches a point where all scheming and prejudices have disappeared. By making use of scheming, a person risks blocking the transparency of the heart-mind, and by clinging to prejudices it hinders one from clear knowledge. Accordingly, attaining vacuity comes down to clearing away obstructions of heart-mind and bringing order to the actions of intelligence.

In order to attain vacuity, one must preserve tranquility. Only through the practice of preserving tranquility can one prepare oneself sufficiently and store one's energy.

This chapter also mentions "returning to the root" and "returning to the mandate." "Returning to the root" means going back to the origin of all there

is. This origin presents itself in a state of vacuity and tranquility. Moreover, the original nature of everything that exists is one of vacuity and tranquility. The notion of "returning to the mandate" consists precisely in returning to this state of natural inclinations (本性).

This notion of "returning to the mandate" can be seen as the basis for the discussion of "returning to human nature" in the Neo-Confucianism of the Song period. The idea of "returning to the beginning (复初)" advocated in the *Shan xing* 缮性 [*Mending Nature*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] resembles that of "returning to the root" and "returning to the mandate" and is closely tied up with what is discussed in the present chapter. Laozi's notion of 'returning' entails a process of reflection concerning the inner subjectivity and agency of human beings. Both Laozi and Zhuangzi consider that our heart-mind is originally clear and transparent, only becoming disturbed and obscured by the activities of clever calculation and lustful craving. That is why one must forsake such activities in order to go back to the sphere of primordial clarity and transparency.

Seventeen

太上 (1)，下知有之 (2)；其次，親而譽之；其次，畏之；其次，侮之。信不足焉，有不信焉。
悠兮 (3) 其貴言 (4)。功成事遂，百姓皆謂：“我自然 (5)。”

Tai 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] (1), *xia* 下 [below, under, the masses] know they exist (2). Those *ci* 次 [second, next, inferior] are adored and praised. The lesser ones are feared. The lowest of them all are derided. When there is not enough credibility, there will be no trust. How *you* 悠 [remote, leisurely] (3) when words are *gui* 贵 [to value, valuable] (4). When success is accomplished and things succeed, the common people all say: “We are *ziran* 自然 [natural, self-so, spontaneous] (5).”

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior]: The best, the highest. This refers to the best epoch or generation (世). This chapter speaks of “the best,” “the second best,” and so on in the sense of a scale of value, rather than a temporal succession which most ancient commentaries claim.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): “*Tai shang* 太上 amounts to ‘the highest.’ The highest is the world of the great Dao, in which [all things can] forget each other within non-action (无为).”

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): “*Tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] is an ancient expression meaning the highest or the best. In the *Wei zheng* 魏策 [*Strategies of Wei*] chapter [in the *Zhanguo ce* 战国策 [*Strategies of the Warring States*], we read: ‘Therefore, in making plans on behalf of you my king, [I suggest that] *tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] is to attack Qin, the second best option is to pledge allegiance to Qin, the third best option is to maintain the treaties [with the other states] while feigning to negotiate [with Qin] and the allied states stick together.’ Here it is stated that the best option would be to attack Qin. In the *Zuozhuan* 左传 [*Commentary of Zuo*] (24th year of Duke Xiang 襄 of Lu), it says: ‘It is best (太上) to establish virtue (立德). The next best is to establish deeds (立功). The lowest is to establish words (立言).’ Here it is argued that the

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highest endeavor is establishing virtue. In the *Lülan* 吕览 [*Examinations of Lü*][1] (*Meng Qiu ji, Jin se* 孟秋纪, 禁塞 [Volume "*Almanacs: The First Month of Autumn*", Chapter "*On Restrictions and Obstructions*"]), there is the following passage: 'Those who [recommend] aiding and protecting believe that [in warfare] it is best (太上) to negotiate and to only resort to military force as a secondary option.' Here it is claimed that those who recommend aiding and protecting believe the best thing is to negotiate. In the *You shi lan, jin ting* 有始览, 谨听 [Volume "*Examinations of the Beginning*", Chapter "*On Listening Attentively*"] of the same work, we read: 'It is best (太上) to know. The next best thing is to know that one does not know.' Here it is argued that the best thing is to know. All of these passages offer sufficient evidence [of using of *tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] in the sense of a scale of value instead of a temporal succession]. In this chapter of the *Laozi*, *tai shang* 太上 also means the best, which refers to the degree of rising or declining of an age, while in particular it denotes an ideal epoch. Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 240) commentary reads: '*Tai shang* 太上 means a great person (大人). A great person is superior (在上), which is why the text speaks of *tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior.' Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) notes that '*Tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] refers to the nameless rulers of remote antiquity.' Starting from these two commentaries, later interpretations of the *Laozi* all came to interpret the phrase *tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] as referring to the ruler, an error which has continued up to this day." (*Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*]).

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001) writes that "*Tai shang* 太上 means the highest or the best. The words *qi ci* 其次 in the following sentences mean 'less good.' This refers to a difference in value."

2) *Xia* 下 [below, under, the masses] knows they exist: The people only know of the ruler's existence.

The Wu Cheng version, the Ming Taizu 明太祖 (d. 1398) version, the Jiao Hong 焦竑 (d. 1620) version, the Deng Qi 邓锜 (Yuan dynasty) version, the Pan Jingguan 潘静观 version, and the Zhou Rudi 周如砥 (d. 1615) version all have *bu* 不 [not] instead of *xia* 下 [below, under]. The last sentence in this chapter, "The common people all say: 'We are *ziran* 自然 [natural, self-so, spontaneous],'" can be seen as an explanation

1 Tr. note: Better known as the *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*].

of the notion that "they do not know the ruler exists" (不知有之) (the people are not aware that there is something like sovereign power). If this phrase is rendered as "not knowing," its significance becomes more profound. But if we consult the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version, we read "the masses (下) knows they exist" there. Accordingly, I have decided to continue following the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version and the Wang Bi edition here.

3) How *you* 悠 [remote, leisurely]: Leisurely and carefree. The Heshang Gong version, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, the Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century) version, and the Wu Cheng version have *you* 犹 [still, yet, hesitate] instead of *you* 悠. In the Jinglong era stele version and the Kou Caizhi 寇才质 (12th century) version, *you* 犹 [still, yet, hesitate] is written *you* 由 [to follow, from, because of]. Note: *you* 悠 [remote, leisurely], *you* 犹 [still, yet, hesitate], *you* 由 [to follow, from, because of] were used interchangeably in ancient Chinese.

4) When words are *gui* 贵 [to value, valuable]: A description of not issuing orders casually.

Wu Cheng: "*Gui* 贵 [to value, valuable] means to treasure. If one treasures words, then they will not be spoken lightly. Now the 'sage' does not speak and does not act, [but] lets the people receive the favors he bestows upon them without awareness, so that each can be content with their lives."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "'Valuing words' has the same meaning as *xi yan* 希言 [speaking less'] in chapter 23. In both cases, *yan* 言 [to speak, word] refers to issuing top-down decrees, laws, and policies (声教法令)."

5) *Ziran* 自然: What is self-so (自己如此).

Wu Cheng: "*Ran* 然 means 'so' or 'like this (如此).' The common people all say 'we are self-so.'"

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "In the *Shigu* 释诂 [*Explaining Old Words*] chapter of the *Guangya* 广雅 [*Expanded Version of the Erya*], it says: '*Ran* 然 means to become (成).' *Ziran* 自然 refers to what 'becomes out of itself (自成).'"

Che Zai 车载 (d. 1977): "Throughout the entire text of the *Laozi*, there are five passages where the term *ziran* 自然 is invoked. [...] When the *Laozi* introduces this term and uses it in various contexts, it is never approached as the objectively existing natural world. Rather, it is always used to refer to a natural state devoid of any human interference which is simply as it is without anyone knowing why. As such, it is simply a

description of the idea of 'non-action' at the center of the whole book." (*Lun Laozi* 论老子 [*On the Laozi*]).

Contemporary Translation

In the best of times, the people are only aware of the existence of the ruler. In the second best case, the people are on intimate terms with the ruler and sing his praises. In the third best case, the people fear the ruler. In the worst case, they condemn him. If the ruler lacks sincerity and credibility, the people will naturally not believe in him.

(The ideal ruler) acts in a carefree and leisurely manner and does not issue orders casually. When a certain affair has been accomplished, the common people all say "This is simply how we have always been."

Argument

Finding himself in the midst of the despotic exercise of power and never losing touch with the cruelty of the actual circumstances [of his time], Laozi yearned for an age in which "how could the power of the sovereign have any bearing on me?"[2] and hoped that in such an age, the people would not suffer interference from the tyrannical power and be able to live a free and untroubled life.

To begin with, in the ideal form of government envisaged by Laozi, the ruler would have a sincere and honest character. Secondly, the government would merely be an instrument in the service of the people. Thirdly, the authority of the government would not be violently forced upon the people in any way.

Laozi contrasts this ideal political environment with a rule by virtue and a rule by law: suppressing the people by means of harsh laws and punishments is the expression of a lack of trustworthiness on the part of the ruler. If the ruler is not trustworthy enough, this will automatically give rise to a situation

2 Tr. note: This quote is from the ancient poem *Ji rang ge* 击壤歌 [*A song* [*sung while the singer is*] *beating the ground*]. However, there are several versions of the *Ji rang ge* which result from the difference in this particular line quoted here. The current quote is identical to the version in Shen Deqian's 沈德潜 (d. 1769) *Gu shi yuan* 古诗源 [*Source of the Ancient Poetry*], viz., "帝力于我何有哉!". In the *Yue fu shi ji* 乐府诗集 [*Collected Songs in the Music Bureau Style*] by Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (d. 1099), it is recorded as "帝何力于我哉?", while one of the earliest versions seen in Wang Chong's 王充 (d. c. 97) *Lun Heng* 论衡 [*Discourses Weighed in the Balance*] has "尧何等力?".

where the people "do not believe in him." Consequently, the ruler will resort to oppressive policies and thereby embark on a downward path. Laozi fiercely opposes this kind of rule by punishment. While there is nothing wrong with the idea of ruling by virtue per se, in Laozi's view it is already marked by a certain meddlesomeness. When a ruler provides consolation today and comfort tomorrow (which will admittedly allow him to win acclaim), this suggests that hurting and neglecting the people is already happening [otherwise there is no need for consolation and comfort]. The greatest form of politics consists in nothing else but "valuing words." In an ideal political condition where "words are valued," the people and the government would live in peace with each other, so much so that the people would essentially not even know who the ruler is ("they do not know he exists"). When political coercion has been fully dispensed with, everyone will be able to breath in the air of carefreeness and contentment. This is the Utopian political situation imagined by Laozi.

Eighteen

大道廢，有仁義 (1)；六親 (2) 不和，有孝慈；國家昏亂，有忠臣 (3)。

When the great Dao is abandoned, there is humaneness and righteousness (义) (1). When three family relations and six roles (六亲) (2) lack harmony, there is filial piety and parental care. When the state and families are thrown into confusion, then loyal servants arise (3).

Commentary and Explanation

1) When the great Dao is abandoned, there is humaneness and righteousness: The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version and the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version have "when the great Dao is abandoned, *an* 安 [safe, settled, calm, satisfied] there is humaneness and righteousness." *An* 安 [safe, settled, calm, satisfied] is the same as *nai* 乃, which should both be understood as "only then" or "afterwards."

Feng Youlan (Fung You-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "'When the great Dao is abandoned, there is humaneness and righteousness': This does not at all mean that human beings can simply be inhumane and unrighteous. It simply means that within the 'great Dao,' people are naturally humane and righteous, which is the genuine form of humanness and righteousness. As for the kind of humaneness and righteousness acquired through learning and training, these are always partly the result of imitation. In comparison to a naturally present genuine humaneness and righteousness, they are of a slightly lower order. When we read in the *Laozi* that 'Higher *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy] is not *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy]' (Chapter 38), this is what is meant."

Note: in the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] and the received version, we find the phrases "when wisdom appears, there is great hypocrisy" (智慧出, 有大伪) after this sentence. These phrases are not present in the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version and they should be omitted. The superfluous addition of these phrases is probably the result of the influence exerted by the theories of extremist followers of Zhuangzi 庄子 in the late Warring States period, who preposterously added them to the text. Because of this addition, the terms

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"humaneness" and "righteousness" risk being connected to the words "great hypocrisy," which would result in a downright negation of humane and righteous conduct. If we carefully examine the original meaning of the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version of the text it becomes clear that there is no such depreciation of "humaneness and righteousness," "filial piety and parental care," or "loyalty to the ruler." Quite to the contrary, the text makes it clear that when changes occur in the most beautiful primordial state and problems appear in interpersonal relations, the virtues of humaneness, righteousness, filial piety, and parental care, as well as the moral integrity of upright servants, become highly commendable. In the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version this chapter consists of three parallel sentences, which is also the case in the next chapter. If we take the syntax and the meaning of the sentences in question into account, the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version seems to correspond to what must have been the original edition of the text.

2) The three family relations and six roles (六亲): Between fathers and sons, younger and older brothers, and between husband and wife.

Loyal servants: The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version has "upright servants (正臣)." The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions and the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version have "faithful servants (贞臣)."

Contemporary Translation

When the great Dao ceases to be binding, only then do humaneness and righteousness appear. When there is no longer any harmony in the family, only then do filial piety and parental care become manifest. When the government of the state is in disarray, only then do loyal servants present themselves.

Argument

A fish in the water is not aware of the importance of water. A person in the open air is not aware of the importance of oxygen. When the great Dao reigns supreme, humaneness and righteousness prevail in its midst and consequently no one will feel the need to promote these virtues. If we get to the point where humaneness and righteousness have to be advocated, society has already lost its state of purity and honesty.

It is precisely when moral integrity is utterly lacking and society finds itself in a state of upheaval that the commendation of all sorts of moral virtues such as humaneness and righteousness, filial piety and parental care, and loyal servitude appears to provide sorely needed help.

Nineteen

絕智棄辯 (1)，民利百倍；絕僞棄詐 (2)，民復孝慈；絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。此三者 (3) 以爲文 (4)，不足。故令有所屬 (5)：見素抱樸 (6)，少私寡欲。

Sever all ties with *zhi* 智 [wisdom, knowledge] and give up *bian* 辯 [debate, disputation] (1), the people will be a hundred times better off. Sever all ties with *wei* 伪 [false, falsity, hypocrisy] and give up *zha* 诈 [to pretend, cheat, swindle] (2), the people will return to filial piety and parental care (慈). Sever all ties with ingenuity and give up profit, there will be no more bandits and robbers. When these three things (3) are used for *wen* 文 [text, writing, outward appearance, adornment] (4), it will not suffice. Therefore, ensure that there is something to *shu* 属 [to belong to]: observe *su* 素 [simple, plain, white] and embrace *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, unadorned, uncarved wood] (6), be less concerned with yourself and minimize your desires.

Commentary and Explanation

1) Sever all ties with *zhi* 智 [wisdom, knowledge] and give up *bian* 辯 [debate, disputation]: The received version has "sever all ties with sagacity (圣) and give up wisdom." The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version reads "sever all ties with wisdom and give up disputation." Since it is the oldest extant version of the original text, I have amended this sentence on the basis of the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version. If we go through the entire text of the *Laozi* we find a total of 32 occurrences of the word "sage (圣人)." Laozi uses the notion of "sagacity" as a metaphor for the highest state of personal self-cultivation. The expression "sever all ties with sagacity" found in the received version editions however runs contrary to the positive affirmation of "sagacity" generally found throughout the rest of the book. The phrase "sever all ties with sagacity and give up wisdom" occurs in the chapters *Quqie* 胠篋 [*Pilfering Chests*] and *Zaiyu* 在宥 [*Letting Things Be*] [of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子, *Writings of Master Zhuang*] composed by followers of Zhuangzi. That this phrase appears here is a result of the fact that the transcriber preposterously

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altered the text of the present chapter on the basis of these passages in the *Zhuangzi*.

2) Sever all ties with *wei* 伪 [false, falsity, hypocrisy] and give up *zha* 诈 [to pretend, cheat, swindle]: Commonly available editions read "sever all ties with humaneness (仁) and let go of righteousness (义)." The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version has "sever all ties with hypocrisy and give up pretense." Since it is the oldest extant version of the original text, I have amended this sentence on the basis of the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version. Chapter 8 of the *Laozi* advocates the notion that people should esteem humaneness in their interactions ("The phrase 'excelling in humaneness in interacting with others' makes it clear that Laozi did not at all abandon the idea of humaneness and righteousness. It is only when the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* were unearthed that we became aware of the fact that the current passage was changed later on.") In the *Quqie* 胠篋 [*Pilfering Chests*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], we encounter the expression "rejecting humaneness and righteousness (攘弃仁义)," which allows us to conjecture that the original text was intentionally changed from "sever all ties with hypocrisy and give up pretense" to "sever all ties with humaneness and let go of righteousness." Perhaps this was due to the influence of the thought of the extremist followers of Zhuangzi.

Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 (b. 1935): "It seems that this sentence from the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version [A] should be read as 'cut off all ties with 忽 (*wei* 伪) and let go of 虑 (*zha* 诈).' 虑 is phonetically related to *qie* 且, and its pronunciation is close to *zha* 诈." (*'Guodian Chumu zhujian' zhushi*《郭店楚墓竹简》注释 [*Annotated Edition of the Bamboo Slips in the Chu Tomb at Guodian*]).

Peng Hao 彭浩 (b. 1944): "虑 is phonetically related to *qie* 且 and the character is read as *xie* 亵 [...] which has the same meaning as *e* 恶 [evil, monstrous]." (*Guodian Chujian Laozi jiaodu* 郭店楚简老子校读 [*Collation and Reading of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]).

Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植 (b. 1947): "The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions and the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 240) version all have 'sever all ties with humaneness and let go of righteousness, the people will return to filial piety and parental care.' In the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* Bamboo Slips we find none of the extreme opposition to humanistic values expressed in the sentence 'sever all ties with humaneness and let go of righteousness.' As far as the philosophical development of the *Laozi* is

concerned, the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version would seem to be a relatively older version." (*Guodian zhujian Laozi shixi yu yanjiu* 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*An Analysis and Investigation into the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]).

Note: The pronunciation of character 慮 in the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version [A] is related to the pronunciation of *qie* 且, which is phonetically close to *zha* 诈. However, many scholars assume that this character is best understood as *lü* 虑, meaning "to plan", which also makes sense. In other bamboo slips from the same period (the Warring States) preserved in the Shanghai Museum, the characters 忽 and 慮 also appear. Moreover, the style of the characters from the Chu region in these slips is similar to those found in the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version of the *Laozi*. Accordingly, I have still retained the reading "sever all ties with hypocrisy and give up pretense" here.

2) These three things: Refers to wisdom and disputation, hypocrisy and pretense, and ingenuity and profit.
3) *Wen* 文 [text, writing, outward appearance, adornment]: Fine decoration, ostentatious decoration.
4) *Shu* 属 [to belong to]: To belong, to comply with.
5) Observe *su* 素 [simple, plain, white] and embrace *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, unadorned, uncarved wood]: The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version reads "observe (视) what is simple and preserve (保) what is unadorned." *Su* 素 [simple, plain, white] means undyed silk, *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, unadorned, uncarved wood] means uncarved wood. These two terms have the same sense here.

Contemporary Translation

Abandon clever argumentation and the people will be able to obtain a hundred times more advantages. Forsake hypocrisy and pretense and the people will be able to recover their innate filial piety and parental care. Abandon trickery and material profits and robbers and bandits will automatically disappear. (Wisdom and disputation, hypocrisy and pretense, and ingenuity and profit), these three pairs of things are external embellishments and are not enough to govern the world. Therefore, in order to cause the people to ascribe [to the state'], preserve simplicity and reduce selfish desires.

Argument

Laozi advocates "observing simplicity and embracing the unadorned." He believes that if those in power at the higher levels of society can govern through simplicity, become less concerned with themselves, moderate their selfish desires, and abandon clever argumentation, hypocrisy and pretense, and ingenuity and profit, this will allow the people to enjoy stability, filial piety, and parental care, all while living in a peaceful social environment.

In this and the preceding chapters, Laozi never tires of affirming [the value of] virtuous conduct, such as filial piety and parental care, which matches what we find in Chapter 67: "I have three treasures to guard and protect. The first is called loving-kindness …"

The biggest difference between the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version and the received version is that the sentence "sever all ties with hypocrisy and let go of pretense" came to be replaced by "sever all ties with humaneness and let go of righteousness." If we follow the received version, then "severing all ties with humaneness and letting go of righteousness" means that while humaneness and righteousness were originally meant to urge people to do what is good, these virtues have now degenerated into something wholly artificial. Accordingly, some people abuse the ideals of humaneness and righteousness for their own worldly benefit. After such people have gained a position of power, they change to the point of becoming unrecognizable, and pose as dignified moral teachers of a whole generation, using the beautiful sounding terms humaneness and righteousness in whatever way suits them best. Zhuangzi bitterly exclaimed, "When humaneness and righteousness are performed to rectify [the people], humaneness and righteousness are used to rob them […] Those who rob the state become feudal lords and humaneness and righteousness are stored at their gates." [*Quqie* 胠篋 (*Pilfering Chests*)]. Circumstances may not have been as dire in Laozi's age, but already sufficient enough to deceive the people. That is why he believed that it would be better to abandon such external pretexts which are open to abuse altogether and to recover our innate natural feelings of filial piety and parental care.

The prevalent custom [at that time] attached importance to "refinement (文)," while Laozi emphasized one's basic "disposition (质)." Laozi saw "refinement" as an external embellishment which goes against what is natural to human beings. The spread of such embellishments gives rise to all sorts of visible and invisible restrictions which constrain people's natural spontaneity. The indignation Laozi displays in this chapter was provoked by the disastrous consequences of the pretensions of civilization.

Twenty

絕學無憂 (1)。唯之與阿 (2)，相去幾何？美之與惡 (3)，相去若何？人之所畏，不可不畏 (4)。
荒兮，其未央哉 (5)！
衆人熙熙 (6)，如享太牢，如春登臺 (7)。
我 (8) 獨泊 (9) 兮，其未兆 (10)，如嬰兒之未孩 (11)；儽儽兮 (12)，若無所歸。
衆人皆有餘 (13)，而我獨若遺 (14)。我愚人 (15) 之心也哉！沌沌兮！
俗人昭昭 (16)，我獨昏昏 (17)。
俗人察察 (18)，我獨悶悶 (19)。
澹兮其若海，飂兮若無止 (20)。
衆人皆有以 (21)，而我獨頑且鄙 (22)。
我獨異於人，而貴食母 (23)。

Abandon learning and be without *you* 忧 [worry, sorrow] (1). *Wei* 唯 [yes, indeed] *zhi* 之 [it] and *e* 阿 [yeah] (2), how far are these removed from each other? Being beautiful or being ugly (3), what difference is there? What is feared by others, a person will not *ke* 可 [able, approve, yet] not to *wei* 畏 [fear, respect] it (4).

How *huang* 荒 [wasteland, desolate], it is *wei* 未 [not yet] *yang* 央 [center, to end, finish] (5)!

The multitudes *xixi* 熙熙 [happy, merry] (6), as if they were enjoying the *tailao* 太牢 sacrifice,[1] as if they were mounting the terraces in springtime (7).

Wo 我 [I, me] (8) alone, how *bo/po* 泊 [tranquil, peaceful] (9) am I, not yet *zhao* 兆 [sign, portent] (10), like an infant that has not yet *hai* 孩 [child, to laugh] (11); how *leilei* 儽儽 [tired, worn] (12), as if I have nowhere to return to.

The multitudes all have enough to spare (13), I alone am as *yi* 遗 [to lose, leave behind, omit] (14). My heart is truly that of a *yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid] (15)! How muddle[heade]d!

Ordinary people are *zhaozhao* 昭昭 [brilliant, resplendent] (16), I alone am *hunhun* 昏昏 [dim, confused] (17).

Ordinary people are *chacha* 察察 [discerning, meticulous] (18), I alone am *menmen* 闷闷 [muffled, gloomy, depressed] (19).

1 Tr. note: Involving three different sacrificial animals (usually a goat, an ox, and a pig).

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How *dan* 澹 [tranquil], like the ocean, how *liu* 飂 [fierce wind], as if it will never end (20).

The multitudes all have *yi* 以 [to use, in order to, for] (21), and I alone am stupid *qie* 且 [moreover, and, also] *bi* 鄙 [rustic, vulgar] (22).

I alone am different from other people, and value the nurturing mother (食母) (23).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Abandon learning and be without *you* 忧 [worry, sorrow]: Means that a person can be free from disturbance by abandoning alienated forms of learning. "Without *you* 忧 [worry, sorrow]" means "undisturbed."

Note: in the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version, this sentence follows Chapter 48 which opens with the line "for learning daily increasing (为学日益)," but is still placed before the phrase "yes, indeed [it] and yeah (唯之与阿)," as is also the case in the received version.

2) *Wei* 唯 [yes, indeed] *zhi* 之 [it] and *e* 阿 [yeah]: *Wei* 唯 is a respectful expression of agreement, used by younger generations in addressing their elders. *E* 阿 [yeah] is a casual expression of agreement, used by older towards younger generations. Both words are sounds used in responding; *e* 阿 [yeah] is high-pitched, and *wei* 唯 [yes, indeed] has a more hushed sound. Here, they indicate the distinction between what is superior and inferior and what is noble and humble.

Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (d. 669) notes: "*Wei* 唯 [yes, indeed] is a respectful way of response, while *e* 阿 [yeah] is a casual way of response."

3) Being beautiful or being ugly: The Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version has "good (善)" instead of "beautiful (美)." Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version has "beautiful," as is also the case in the *Guodian* and the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version. Amended on the basis of the latter.

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920) notes: "The Wang Bi version originally read 'being beautiful or being ugly, what difference is there?', just as Fu Yi's version. In Wang's commentary we read: 'How do *wei* 唯 [yes, indeed] and *e* 阿 [yeah] and the beautiful and the ugly differ?' This proves that the received Wang Bi edition is not the original one." (*Du Lao zhaji* 读老札记 [*Reading Notes on the Laozi*]).

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) remarks: "What Yi says is correct. In Chapter 2 we read: 'All under the sky know beautiful as beautiful, then [there is]

already ugly (天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已).' Here, the contrast between 'beautiful' and 'ugly' is also used, which proves that the text should read 'beautiful' instead of 'good.'" (*Laozi zhenggu* 老子正诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*]).

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992) notes: "Here it is argued that while *wei* 唯 [yes, indeed] and *e* 阿 [yeah] and beauty and ugliness are opposites, they are ultimately not so far removed from each other. It wants to make clear that what is usually considered to be compliance or resistance or beauty and ugliness are not necessarily normatively binding."

What is feared by others, a person will not be able not to fear it: In the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] this sentence is rendered as "what is feared by others, it too cannot but fear them (人之所畏，亦不可以不畏人)."

D. C. Lau (Liu Dianjue) 刘殿爵 (d. 2010) comments: "The current text reads 'what is feared by others, a person will not be able not to fear it.' The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* have 人之所畏 [what is feared by others] (in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version the last two characters are missing) 亦不可以不畏人 [also cannot but fear others] (in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version the characters starting from *ke* 可 [able, approve, yet] are missing).[2] In the last phrase, the word *yi* 亦 [also, in addition] at the beginning, the word *yi* 以 [to use, in order to, for] after *ke* 可 [able, approve, yet] and the word *ren* 人 [human] after *wei* 畏 [fear, respect] are superfluous. The meaning of the text of the received edition is that one cannot help fearing what others are afraid of. By contrast, what is meant in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions is that someone who is feared by others—that is to say, the ruler—should also fear those that fear him. The difference in meaning between these two versions is considerable. The first denotes a common idea, the second is specifically addressed to the ruler and concerned with the art of governing." (*Mawangdui Hanmu boshu Laozi chutan* 马王堆汉墓帛书老子初探 [*A Tentative Inquiry into the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi found in the Han dynasty Tomb at Mawangdui*], *Mingbao yuekan* 明报月刊, September 1982).

Zhang Shunhui notes: "Many different versions have 'what is feared by others, a person will not be able not to fear it.' The meaning of this

2 Tr. note: The text "人之所畏，亦不可不畏人" is recorded in the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version, which preserves the entire sentence, while most of the characters of this sentence are lost in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version.

sentence is unclear and clearly shows lacunae. I have amended it on the basis of the *Mawangdui* versions. There, we read that when the ruler is feared by the masses, he too cannot avoid fearing them."

4) How *huang* 荒 [wasteland, desolate], it is *wei* 未 [not yet] *yang* 央 [center, to end, finish]: Spirit reaches far and wide and has no boundaries. "How *huang* 荒" means vast and desolate, "*wei yang* 未央" means endless.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) remarks: "*Huang* 荒 has the same meaning as *guang* 广 [expansive, wide]. *Yang* 央 means *jin* 尽 [to use up, end, limit]."

Gao Heng notes: "This sentence simply means 'boundless and limitless.'"

Wang Bi notes: "It expresses being significantly different from the ordinary people."

5) *Xixi* 熙熙 [happy, merry]: Giving free rein to one's urges and being in high spirits.

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) remarks: "*Xixi* 熙熙 means wantonly giving free rein to one's emotions and desires."

Wang Bi notes: "The multitudes lose themselves in beauty and promotion and are deluded by glory and benefit, their desires marsh forwards and their hearts contend."

6) As if they were mounting the terraces in springtime: As if they climb the terraces in the spring to gaze across the horizon.

This phrase is rendered "as if they were mounting the terraces in springtime" (如春登台) in the Wang Bi version, and "as if they were mounting the spring terraces" (如登春台) in Heshang Gong's version.

Gao Heng notes: "This phrase should read 'as if they were mounting the spring terraces', since the syntax runs parallel with that of the previous sentence ('as if they were enjoying the *tailao* sacrifice 如享太牢)." Gao has a point, but we should base ourselves on Bi Yuan's 毕沅 (d. 1797) and Yu Yue's 俞樾 (d. 1907) arguments here.

Bi Yuan comments: "Both the Wang Bi version and the Gu Huan 顾欢 (d. 485) version read 'as if they were mounting the terraces in springtime' (如春登台). The *Minghuang* 明皇[3] edition and the stone inscription at Yizhou have the same. [However,] the mistaken version 'as if they were mounting the spring terraces' (如登春台) first appeared in the reprinted *Minghuang* 明皇 edition in the *Dao zang* 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*] in the 10th year of the Zhengtong 正统 era of the Ming dynasty [1445]. The same mistake occurs in the versions of Lu Xisheng 陆希声 (d. 895 or 901) and Wang

3 Tr. note: Refers to the posthumous name of the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (d. 756).

Zhen 王真 (late Tang; ca. 9th century), as well as in all editions which are now commonly used."

Yu Yue comments: "Note: Because the phrase 'as if they were mounting the terraces in springtime' (如春登台) runs parallel with the structure of the phrase 'as if they were crossing a river in wintertime' (若冬涉川) from Chapter 15, we can ascertain that the version in the Heshang Gong edition, which reads 'as if they were mounting the spring terraces (如登春台)', is incorrect. Besides, Heshang Gong's comment on this phrase goes as follows: 'In spring, *yin* and *yang* interact and the myriad things resonate with and affect each other; if one mounts the terraces to observe this, one's thoughts and intentions will become licentious.' The meaning is not coherent with the phrase 'mounting the spring terraces,' thus the [original] text the Heshang Gong commentary based itself on must have also read 'mounting the terraces in springtime.' The mistake in current editions is the result of a copying error." Note: Yu Yue bases his theory on Heshang Gong's commentary to argue that in the original Heshang Gong version, this sentence also read "as if they were mounting the terraces in springtime", which can be corroborated by the fact that the *Mawangdui* versions render this sentence as "mounting the terraces in springtime."

7) *Wo* 我 [I, me]: Here, Laozi refers to himself in the first person to express his state of mind and the spiritual horizon in which he finds himself.

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001) comments: "When Laozi refers to himself in the first person, this 'I' is a self which is conversing with the 'Dao', and not with the ordinary world. Using this 'I' as the subject, Laozi sits cross-legged in the mountain valley of Chinese history and speaks to himself of the worries and joys of human beings. His monologue, just like wind blowing through the pines in a mountain valley, sounds shrill, but at the same time clear and poetic, like the sound of the lapping waves at night."

8) *Bo/po* 泊 [tranquil, peaceful]: Indifferent, tranquil.

9) Not yet *zhao* 兆 [sign, portent]: Not showing any indication. Describes not flaunting one's talents. *Zhao* 兆 means omen or sign.

10) *Hai* 孩 [child, to laugh]: Same as *hai* 咳. In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] we read: "*Hai* 咳, the laughter of a small child. Derived from *kou* 口 [mouth], pronounced *hai* 亥. *Hai* 孩 is the old form of *hai* 咳, derived from *zi* 子 [child, son]." The ancient characters for *hai* 孩 and *hai* 咳 were identical, meaning the laughter of a baby.

Fu Yi's version and Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version have *hai* 咳 instead of *hai* 孩.

11) How *leilei* 儡儡 [tired, worn]: *Leilei* 儡儡 is almost synonymous with other doubled adjectives such as *leilei* 磊磊 [like innumerable stones], *leilei* 磊磊 [like a heap of stones], *luoluo* 硌硌 [hard, piled up], and *luoluo* 落落 [scattered, dispersed, aloof]. "How *leilei* 磊磊" means companionless and socially aloof, having nothing to rely on.

Fan Yingyuan remarks: "How *leilei* 儡儡 means without external ritual accomplishment."

12) Have enough to spare: Heshang Gong notes: "The multitudes wallow in their excessive riches and swindle in their excessive intelligence."

13) *Yi* 遗 [to lose, leave behind, omit]: Means insufficient here.

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) notes: "*Yi* 遗 is a loanword for *kui* 匮 [lack, scarce], which means insufficient."

14) A fool: "Foolishness (愚)" refers to a state of simplicity and authenticity. Laozi himself considered "foolishness" to constitute an existential horizon reached through the highest form of self-cultivation.

15) *Zhaozhao* 昭昭 [brilliant, resplendent]: Shiny and ostentatious.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) comments: "*Zhaozhao* 昭昭 means displaying one's cleverness and ingenuity."

16) *Hunhun* 昏昏 [dim, confused]: Obscure or ignorant.

17) *Chacha* 察察 [discerning, meticulous]: Strict and unforgiving.

Shi Deqing comments: "*Chacha* 察察 means what is commonly called 'haggling over every ounce' and 'not giving people a break.'"

18) *Menmen* 闷闷 [muffled, gloomy, depressed]: In an unsophisticated manner.

19) How *dan* 澹 [tranquil], like the ocean, how *liu* 飂 [fierce wind], as if it will never end: *Dan* 澹 [tranquil] means indifferent, serene. *Liu* 飂 [fierce wind] is a fierce wind, and describes a person's detached bearing here. (Wang Bi notes: "Not bound or restrained by anything.")

20) The multitudes all have *yi* 以 [to use, in order to, for]: *Yi* 以 [to use, in order to, for] means "use." "They all desire to be employed and commissioned [so that they can achieve things]." (Wang Bi).

21) Stupid *qie* 且 [moreover, and, also] *bi* 鄙 [rustic, vulgar]: Description of stupidity and boorishness.

The Wang Bi version originally had *si* 似 [to resemble] instead of *qie* 且 [moreover, and, also], but Wang's note reads 顽且鄙也. Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "*Qie* 且 [moreover, and, also] and the ancient form of the character *yi* 以 [to use, in order to, for]—namely, *yi* 吕 [a kind of, loan word for *yi* 以]—resemble one another, which led to the confusion. The characters *yi* 以 [to use, in order to, for] and *si* 似 [to resemble] were used interchangeably in ancient times, so that *qie* 且

[moreover, and, also] was firstly mistaken into *yi* 吕 [a kind of, loan word for *yi* 以], and then *yi* 目 [a kind of, loan word for *yi* 以] was further erroneously rendered as *si* 似." Fu Yi's, Song dynasty emperor Huizong's 宋徽宗 (d. 1135),[4] Deng Qi's 邓锜 (ca. 13th century), Shao Ruoyu's 邵若愚 (ca. 12th century), Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271), and Fan Jingguan's 潘静观 (d. 1692) versions all have *qie* 且 [moreover, and, also] instead of *si* 似 [to resemble]. Amended here on the basis of Fu Yi's version and Wang Bi's note to this phrase.

22) Value the nurturing mother (食母): Taking the preservation of the Dao as what is most valuable. "Mother" is a metaphor for the Dao. The "nurturing mother" is the "Dao" which nourishes the myriad things. Throughout the ages, the words "nurturing mother (食母)" have given rise to all sorts of different interpretations. I will quote a few of them here for reference:

Wang Bi: "The nurturing mother is the root of life."

Heshang Gong: "*Shi* 食 [eat, food] refers to use (用), mother is the Dao."

Fan Yingyuan: "That which nurtures is what nourishes human beings, it is what human beings cannot do without. The mother refers to the Dao."

Wu Cheng: "That which I value most is the dark efficacy (玄德) of the great Dao. Dark efficacy is what the myriad things rely on for nourishment, it is what is called the mother of the myriad things. Therefore it says 'nurturing mother.' The words 'nurturing mother' appear in the chapter *Nei ze* 内则 [*Rules for the Inner Quarters*] of the *Liji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*], where it refers to a wet nurse."

Lao Jian 劳健 (d. 1951): "食 is pronounced *si* 嗣 and means 'to nurture.' 'Mother' refers to the origin. [...] 'Valuing the nurturing mother' and 'returning and holding on to the mother (复守其母)' (Chapter 52), are both meant to extol the origin. 'Nurturing the mother' (食母) and 'holding on to the mother' (守母) is how the Dao is effectuated."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "According to the interpretation in the Heshang Gong version, 食 [eat, food] refers to use (用). However, it seems more adequate and closer to the original meaning to interpret it as 'to nourish' on the basis of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*]. The expression 'nurturing mother' in the *Laozi* and the expression 'being nurtured by heaven' in the *Zhuangzi* have the same sense of 'being nurtured by the Dao.'"

4 Tr. note: Posthumous name of the Song emperor Zhao Ji 赵佶.

Contemporary Translation

By abandoning alienated forms of learning a person can be free of disturbances. Agreement and denunciation, how much difference is there between them? Beauty and ugliness, how much do they differ from each other? What is feared by everybody else, I cannot help but fear it as well.

How expansive is the realm of spirit! It seems to be without end!

Everybody else is in high spirits, as if they are partaking in some sumptuous banquet, or as if they were mounting the terraces to overlook the landscape in springtime.

But me, I'm all alone, indifferent, and at peace. I show no signs, like a baby that doesn't know how to laugh.

Set adrift and companionless, as if I have no home to return to.

Everybody else has too much, only I seem not to have enough. My heart truly is that of a fool! How chaotic and muddleheaded!

Average people all flaunt their talents, only I remain secluded and obscure.

Average people are all shrewd and ingenious, only I am unable to make anything out.

Serene and calm like the bottomless sea, fluttering and floating, as if there were no limits.

Most people all have something to put to use, only I am ignorant and dimwitted.

I am different from the people of the world and value a life progressing in terms of [attaining or embodying] the Dao.

Argument

In Laozi's view, value judgements which determine what is noble and humble, good and evil, right and wrong, or beautiful and ugly and so on are always interdependent and mutually generating. People's value judgements often vary according to historical conditions and change under the influence of differences in the environment. Ordinary value judgements are volatile. That is why Laozi sighs, "what difference is there between them?" Such value judgements may be utterly indeterminate, but does this mean that we can all act whichever way we please? Not at all. We cannot but remain on guard against what everybody else is wary of, there is no need to go out of one's way to cause offense.

Next, Laozi explains the differences between his attitude towards life and the value orientation prevalent in the world: ordinary people rush to and fro

and lose themselves in sensual and material pleasures. Laozi on the other hand enjoys preserving an attitude of detachment and indifference and is only interested in making spiritual progress. In this respect, Laozi reveals his feeling of estrangement from the crowd.

Twenty-One

孔 (1) 德 (2) 之容 (3)，惟道是從。
道之為物，惟恍惟惚 (4)。惚兮恍兮，其中有象 (5)；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮 (6)，其中有精 (7)；其精甚真 (8)，其中有信 (9)。
自今及古　(10)，其名不去，以閱眾甫　(11)。吾何以知眾甫之狀哉！以此 (12)。

Kong 孔 [opening, hole, great] (1) *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] (2) *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] (3) follows only the Dao.

The Dao as a thing—only *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad], only *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused] (4). So *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused], so *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad]! In its midst are the *xiang* 象 [image, figure, sign] (5). So *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad], so *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused]! In its midst are the things. So *yao* 窈 [deep, far-reaching, quiet], so *ming* 冥 [dark, obscure] (6)! In its midst are the *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] (7)! The *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] is/are utterly genuine (8). In its/their midst there is *xin* 信 [trustworthiness] (9).

From today to *gu* 古 [antiquity, old, simple], (10) its name has not been *qu* 去 [to discard, go, get rid of] [but has been used] to inspect the *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] of the multitude (11). How do I know the state of the *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] of the multitude? Going by *ci* 此 [here, this] (12).

Commentary and Explication

1) *Kong* 孔 [opening, hole, great]: Utmost, great.
2) *De* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]: The Dao manifestation and functioning is *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]. The *Tiandi* 天地 [*Heaven and Earth*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] says: "Things getting [it] to live is called *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]." Here, *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] refers to the characteristics of things obtained from the Dao.

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The *Guanzi* 管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*] (see the chapter *Xin shu shang* 心术上 [*Arts of the Heart-Mind (I)*] says: "*De* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] is the dwelling of the Dao. Things produce and reproduce because of it."

Han Fei 韩非 (d. 233 BCE): "*De* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] is the achievement of the Dao." (*Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*].)

Yang Xingshun 杨兴顺 (d. 1987): "*De* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] is the embodiment of the Dao. The Dao relies on *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] to appear in the realm of things."

3) *Rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner]: Operation, manner.

Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): "To act and rise in accordance with the Dao."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "*Rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] might be a loan for *rong* 搈 [to move, to rock], meaning 'to move' (动)." The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*], says: '*Rong* 搈 [to move, to rock], to move (动搈).' The expression *dong rong* 动搈 is a rhymed pairing, also rendered as *dong rong* 动容 in the ancient corpus. One example of this is found in the chapter *Jin xin* 尽心 [*Fully Developing the Heart-mind*] of the *Mengzi* 孟子 [*Writings of Master Meng*]: '[each] movement and turn [of the body] is ritually on the mark—this is the utmost of flourishing *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] (动容周旋中礼者，盛德之至也).' *Rong* 搈 [to move, to rock] used alone also means 'to move'. The section *Shi gu* 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*] in the *Guangya* 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*] says: '*Rong* 搈 [to move, to rock], means to move (动).' The graph is also rendered as *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] in the ancient corpus. One example of this is the *Yue ling* 月令 [*Proceedings of Government in the Different Months*] chapter of the *Li ji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*]: '[Anyone] not careful to [have] their *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] and rest … (不戒其容止者).' The Zheng commentary adds: '*Rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] and rest, refer to [the two contrasting states, namely,] moving and being still (动静).' […] Wang Bi comments 'to act and rise in accordance with the Dao,' which seems to interpret *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] as to move (动).

Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018): "The sentence '*kong* 孔 [opening, hole, great] *de*'s 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] follows only the Dao' speaks of the actions of those who have great *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] only following the Dao. In his commentary Wang Bi mentions 'to act and

rise in accordance with the Dao,' precisely glossing *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] as to move (动). *Rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] used to mean 'to move (动)'; in antiquity, *rong* 容 [to contain, countenance, manner] and *dong* 动 [to move] had the same pronunciation and meaning" (*Laozi boshu jiaozhu* 老子帛书校注 [*Commentary and Annotations to the Mawangdui Laozi*].)

4) The Dao as a thing—only huang 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad], only hu 惚 [indistinct, confused]: The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions read "*dao zhi wu* 道之物 [the thing(s) of the Dao]" instead of "the Dao as a thing (道之为物)." *Huang hu* 恍惚 [indistinct] is the same as *fang fu* 仿佛 [to seem, as if, seeming].

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "*Huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad] and *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused] refer to [something] as though there, as though not there, meaning [something] that cannot be pinpointed."

5) *Xiang* 象 [image, figure, sign]: A mark, a sign.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "Perceivable shapes form things; perceivable *qi* forms *xiang* 象 [image, figure, sign]."

6) So *yao* 窈 [deep, far-reaching, quiet], so *ming* 冥 [dark, obscure]: Profound and dark.

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "*Yao* 窈 [deep, far-reaching, quiet], means subtle and impossible to see. *Ming* 冥 [dark, obscure], means deep and impossible to measure." (*Laozi zhangju xin bian* 老子章句新编 [*A New Parsing, Organization, and Reading of the Laozi*].)

Wu Cheng: "*Yao ming* 窈冥 [deep and dark], murky and dark, completely imperceptible—this is the *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] of the Dao (道之无)."

7) *Jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy]: The smallest original material (原质).

The *Qiu shui* 秋水 [*Autumn Floods*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] reads: "*Jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy], the subtlest of the small." That is, the smallest of the small.

Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972): "The *Nei ye* 内业 [*Inner Cultivation*] chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*] says: '*Jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy], the extreme of *qi*; *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] is the *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] of *qi*. As each person is born, heaven issues forth their *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy].' This meaning of the term *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] fits the current section of the *Laozi*. [The conception of] *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] exemplifies an ancient, rudimentary form of materialism" (*Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校释 [*Explanations of the Laozi*].)

Yan Lingfeng: "*Jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] is essence, energy. It is certainly not something void."

In English language editions of the *Laozi*, the term *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] is usually translated as "essence." Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994) provides the following gloss in English: "The word *jing* 精 (essence) also means intelligence, spirit, life—force." Lin Yutang 林语堂 (d. 1976) translates the term as "life—force."

8) The *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] is/are utterly genuine: This smallest material is real.

Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie): "Philosophically this is the most important chapter of the book. The sentence 'the essence is very real' virtually formed the backbone of Chou Tun-i's (Chou Lien-hsi's, 1017–1073) *Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate*, which centers on the 'reality of the Non-Ultimate and the essence of yin and yang'. And Chou's work laid the foundation of the entire Neo-Confucian metaphysics. Of course Neo-Confucian metaphysics is more directly derived from the *Book of Changes*, but the concepts of reality in the *Book of Changes* and in this chapter are surprisingly similar." (*A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 151)

Comment: Regarding the sentence "the *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy] is/are utterly genuine" Yan Linfeng says: "There four characters do not occur in the *Daode zhenjing cijie* 道德真经次解 [*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*]. Their occurrence here might be due to an error; perhaps they replaced '冥兮窈兮'. The preceding lines read 'so *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused], so *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad]! In its midst are the *xiang* 象 [image, figure, sign]. So *huang* 恍 [indistinct, disquiet, mad], so *hu* 惚 [indistinct, confused]! In its midst are the things.' If the text is to be uniform, this should be followed by 'so *yao* 窈 [deep, far-reaching, quiet], so *ming* 冥 [dark, obscure]! In its midst are the *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy]. So *ming* 冥 [dark, obscure], so *yao* 窈 [deep, far-reaching, quiet], in its midst there is *xin* 信 [trustworthiness].'" Yan's statement is very much worth referring to here.

9) *Xin* 信 [trustworthiness]: Backed by evidence, reliable.

10) From today to antiquity: The received text reads 'from antiquity until today'; here amended based on the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, and the Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version.

Fan Yingyuan: "'From today to antiquity'; the Yan Zun 严遵 (d. 41) and the Wang Bi versions read the same as the ancient text(s)." (*Laozi*

daodejing guben jizhu 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text*].)

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970): "The texts that read 'from antiquity until today' are incorrect. *Gu* 古 [antiquity, old, simple], *qu* 去 [to discard, go, get rid of] and *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] all rhyme."

Gao Heng: "Note: The text should read 'from today to antiquity'; 'its name' (其名) refers to the Dao. The entity called Dao already existed in antiquity. The name 'Dao' is given today and is used to refer to an ancient entity, hence 'from today to antiquity' and not 'from antiquity until today'—the received text is incorrect. Furthermore, the final *gu* 古 [antiquity, old, simple], *qu* 去 [to discard, go, get rid of] and *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] rhyme, and if the phrase read 'from antiquity until today,' the rhyme would be lost." ("*Tan Mawangdui Han mu zhong de bo shu Laozi* 谈马王堆汉墓中的帛书老子 [*Discussing the Silk Manuscript Laozi in the Mawangdui Texts*]", in *Wen wu zazhi* 文物杂志, (1)1974.)

11) To inspect the *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] of the multitude: In order to observe the origin of the myriad things. The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions read "*zhong fu* 众父 [the father of the multitude]" instead.

Wang Bi's version reads: "The *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] of the multitude, the beginning of things."

Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907): "*Fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] is interchangeable with *fu* 父 [father]. The father of the multitude is the same as the *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] of the multitude." Chapter 42 reads: "I use them as fathers of teaching." Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) *Commentary* says: "*Fu* 父 [father], beginning (始)." It also says: "*Fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man], beginning (始).' The father of the multitude is thus the same as the *fu* 甫 [just, beginning, courtesy name for a man] of the multitude."

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992): "The father of the multitude discussed in the *Laozi* is a metaphor for the Dao. The text refers to it as the root (本) of the myriad things and affairs. Referring to the Dao as a father is the same as referring to it as a mother."

12) Going by *ci* 此 [here, this]: The *ci* 此 [here, this] here refers to the Dao.

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "How do I know what the ultimate cause of the myriad things and affairs is like? Through the manifested regularity of the changes and movements of the Dao."

Contemporary Translation

The manner of great efficacy transforms along the Dao.

The Dao as a thing is indistinct. Indistinct, yet there are marks in its midst; indistinct, yet there are actual things in its midst. Profound and dark, yet there is seminal material in its midst; dark and profound, yet there is something reliable in its midst.

From the present back to antiquity its name is never lost. Only based on it can one know the beginning of the myriad things. How do I know the beginning of the myriad things? I know it from "the Dao."

Commentary

The sentence "The manner of great efficacy transforms along the Dao" describes the relationship between Dao and *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]. Their relationship is this:

(1) The Dao is formless, it must act upon things, and manifest its function through the mediation of things. The Dao's function manifest in things is called *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].

(2) All things are formed by the Dao; the Dao inherent in the myriad things displays its properties, its *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power], in all phenomena.

(3) The metaphysical Dao descended to the level of human life is called *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]. The Dao as such is hidden and formless, and its manifestation is *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].

This chapter and Chapter 14 describe the metaphysical Dao. The metaphysical Dao is muddled and formless, but in its depth and darkness there are things, marks, and seminal material. These three statements—"in its midst there are things", "in its midst there are marks", and "in its midst there is seminal material"—speak to the Dao real existence (真实存在性).

Twenty-Two

曲則全，枉 (1) 則直，窪則盈，敝則新，少則得，多則惑。
是以聖人執一 (2) 爲天下式 (3)。不自見 (4)，故明 (5)；不自是，故彰；不自伐，故有功；不自矜，
故能長 (6)。
夫唯不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。古之所謂 "曲則全" 者，豈虛言哉！誠全而歸之。

When twisted it is whole, by *wang* 枉 [to bend, crooked] (1) it is made straight. What is hollowed out becomes full, what is worn-out becomes new. Having less, you will obtain it; have more, there will be confusion.

Therefore the sage *zhi* 執 [to hold, grasp] *yi* 一 [one, oneness, unity] (2) and becomes *shi* 式 [pattern, standard, model] (3) for the world. [One does] not *zi* 自 [self, oneself, since] *jian* 见 [see, meet, opinion, humble] (4), therefore one is *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent] (5). Because one does not consider oneself as right, one shines forth. Because one is not conceited, one can accomplish [things]. Because one does not boast, one *neng* 能 [to be able to] *chang* 长 [long, to endure] (6).

And so because one does not contend, there is none in the world who can contend with them. When it was said in ancient times "when twisted it is whole," how these have been hollow words! To true completeness is where it returns.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Wang* 枉 [to bend, crooked]: Bent, crooked.
2) *Zhi* 执 [to hold, grasp] *yi* 一 [one, oneness, unity]: The received version has *bao* 抱 [to carry in one's arms, embrace] oneness. The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions have *zhi* 执 [to hold, grasp] *yi* 一 [one, oneness, unity], which is correct.

Note: "holding fast to oneness" is *zhi dao* 执道 (see Chapter 14 of the *Laozi*, the *Tiandi* 天地 [*Heaven and Earth*] chapter in the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] and the *Dao yuan* 道原 [*Origin of the Dao*] chapter in the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*]). "Holding fast to oneness" is an expression often used by Daoists and appears repeatedly in the works of the Daoists from the Jixia 稷下 Academy, such as the *Guanzi*

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管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*] (see the chapters *Xin shu* 心术 [*Arts of the Heart-Mind*] and *Nei ye* 内业 [*Inner Cultivation*]). Afterwards, it also came to be invoked in the *Yao wen* 尧问 [*Questions of Yao*] chapter in the *Xunzi* 荀子 [*Writings of Master Xun*] and the *Yang quan* 扬权 [*Wielding Power*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*].

3) *Shi* 式 [pattern, standard, model]: Model, norm.

4) *Zi* 自 [self, oneself, since] *jian* 见 [see, meet, opinion, humble]: To make oneself appear (自现), to make oneself stand out from the crowd.

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "*Jian* 见 [see, meet, opinion, humble] is pronounced *xian* 现 [appear, current]."

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "*Zi jian* 自见 has the same meaning as *zi xuan* 自炫 [showing off]."

5) *Ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligence]: Manifest, conspicuous.

Note: In the expression "knowing constancy is called *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligence]" from Chapter 16 and the sentence "To see the small is called *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligence]" from Chapter 52, Laozi uses the word *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligence] in his own particular manner. Here on the other hand, it is used in its ordinary sense.

6) *Neng* 能 [to be able to] *chang* 长 [long, to endure]: In the received version the character *neng* 能 [to be able to] before *chang* 长 [long, to endure] is missing. Here it is amended on the basis of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions.

Contemporary Translation

What is broken is that which can be preserved, and the bent can be extended. The hollow can be filled, the worn out can be renewed. By taking less, one can gain more, but greed only leads to confusion.

Therefore, when a person who possesses the Dao holds fast to this principle he or she can become a model for the world. By not praising oneself, a person can stand out. By not regarding oneself to be infallible, one's opinions can become realized. By not bragging about oneself, one's success can be recognized. By not being conceited, one can last long.

Precisely because he does not contend with other people, there is not a single person in the world who struggles with him. When the ancients made statements such as "what is winding can preserve completeness," why would they have been talking idly? What they talked about can truly be attained.

Argument

Ordinary people usually only pay attention to the superficial appearances of things without being able to see the inner. With a wisdom pervaded by his rich life experience, Laozi observed the movements of all sorts of phenomena in the world. In his view, things often come into being within oppositional relations, which means that we have to observe thoroughly the opposites contained within everything. Secondly, we have to see through the negative side of a particular thing by departing from its positive side, and conversely, bring out what is positive about something by grasping its negative aspects. Thirdly, these so-called positive and negative aspects are not two categorically different things. Rather, the positive and the negative are often mutually interdependent, so much so that such opposites frequently count as each other's outer surface and root cause. Ordinary people generally become attached to things and are often eager for quick success, lusting only after pleasures that are right in front of them. Laozi urges us to broaden our horizon, enjoying the flourishing branches and leaves [i.e., the appearance], while also at the same time looking out for the firmness of the root [namely, the inner side]. Only something with firm roots can let its leaves flourish. Because of the relations of interdependence between things, Laozi believes that the principle "preservation" exists within the "broken," the principle of "straightness" exists in what is "crooked," the principle of "fullness" abides in what is "hollow," and the principle of what is "new" is contained in what is "worn-out." Accordingly, by grasping the foundational aspect of the two extremes such as "broken" and "preservation," "crooked" and "straightness," and "new" and "worn-out" one can naturally pass over from one aspect to its opposite.

Ordinary people enjoy pursuing the manifest appearance of things. All living things are impatiently striving for "preservation" and "fullness," some of them rush into seeking conspicuous realization and show-off which gives rise to all sorts of conflicts. The Dao of finding preservation consists in nothing more than "not contending." The Dao of "not contending" comes down to "not praising oneself," "not regarding oneself to be infallible," "not bragging about oneself," and "not being conceited." As such, the words "broken," "crooked," "hollow," and "worn-out" in the opening sentence of this chapter all connote the meaning of "not contending."

Twenty-Three

希言 (1) 自然。
故飄風 (2) 不終朝，驟雨 (3) 不終日。孰爲此者？天地。天地尚不能久，而況於人乎？故從事於道者，同於道 (4)；德者，同於德；失 (5) 者，同於失。
同於德者，道亦德之；同於失者，道亦失之 (6)。
信不足焉，有不信焉 (7)。
Xi 希 [rare, sparse, scattered] *yan* 言 [to talk, words, language] (1) is self-so (自然).

That is why *piao* 飄 [to blow, flutter, float] *feng* 风 [wind] (2) does not last the morning, why *zhou* 驟 [to gallop, sudden] *yu* 雨 [rain] (3) does not last all day. Who has made it so? Heaven and earth. But even heaven and earth cannot make something last, let alone human beings. Therefore, a person who engages in the Dao (从事于道者) becomes identical to the Dao (同于道) (4). One who *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy, to obtain], is identical to *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy, to obtain]. One who loses (5), will become the same as what he has lost. One who obtains will also be obtained by the Dao. One who loses will also be lost to the Dao (6).

When there is no credibility, there will be a lack of trust (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Xi* 希 [rare, sparse, scattered] *yan* 言 [to talk, words, language]: literally means speaking less. On a deeper level it means not issuing policies and decrees. "Speaking" refers to "ruling via renown-authority, education and top-down decrees (声教法令)."

"Speaking less" conforms to what is self-so and stands in direct contrast to "Much speaking expedites failure" in Chapter 5. "Much speaking" (issuing meddlesome policies and decrees) is not in accordance with what is self-so. "Speaking less" has the same meaning as the expression "speechless (不言)" from the sentence "performs speechless instruction (行不言之教)" in Chapter 2.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "'Much speaking (多言)' refers to intensive ruling via renown-authority, education, and top-down decrees. 'Speaking less' means using these forms of ruling

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sparingly. The first coincides with purposive action (有为) and the second with non-action (无为)." (*Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*])

2) *Piao* 飘 [to blow, flutter, float] *feng* 风 [wind]: a fierce or strong wind.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "*Piao* 飘 [to blow, flutter, float] means roaring and rapid."

Wang Huai 王淮 (d. 2009): "The expression 'fierce wind' is used as a metaphor for a tyrannical form of government which bosses the world around and refers to issuing prohibitions."

3) *Zhou* 骤 [to gallop, sudden] *yu* 雨 [rain]: downpour, cloudburst.

Wu Cheng: "*Zhou* 骤 [to gallop, sudden] means sudden and violent."

Wang Huai: "The expression 'sudden downpour' is used here as a metaphor for how a tyrannical government orders the common people around and imposes taxes and penal servitude upon them."

4) Therefore, a person who engages in the Dao (从事于道者) becomes identical to the Dao (同于道): Originally [in the received version], the two characters "the Dao (道者)" were repeated before the phrase "identical to the Dao", so that the entire sentence read "[a person who] engages in the Dao (从事于道者), the Dao becomes identical to the Dao (同于道) (从事于道者, 道者同于道)." I have deleted this repetition on the basis of the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions and the remarks by Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907).

Yu Yue comments: "Note: the second occurrence of the words 道者 is redundant. The ancient original version should be '[a person who] engages in the Dao becomes identical to the Dao (从事于道者, 同于道)' here. In the following sentences, the expression 'to be engaged in (从事)' has been omitted in front of 'one who obtains it (德者)' and 'one who loses it (失者)'. This passage can be read as 'one who is engaged with the Dao, becomes identical to the Dao. One who is engaged in obtaining will become identical to what is obtained. One who is engaged in losing will become identical to the loss (从事于道者同于道，从事于德者同于德，从事于失者同于失)'. In the *Dao ying* 道应 [*Responses of the Dao*] chapter from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*], the Laozi is quoted as saying '[a person who] engages in the Dao becomes identical to the Dao (从事于道者, 同于道),' which can corroborate the fact that the words 'the Dao (道者)' do not occur twice over in ancient editions of the text." Yu is right, as the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* prove.

Yan Fu 嚴復 (d. 1921) remarks: "One who walks becomes identical to the way (道), one who obtains becomes identical to what he obtains

(德), one who loses becomes identical to his loss. All of this refers to the identity of and resonance between the subject and the object."

Yan Fu: "One who walks becomes identical to the way (道), one who obtains becomes identical to what he obtains (德), one who loses becomes identical to his loss. All of this refers to the identity of and resonance between the subject and the object."

5) Loses: Means losing the Dao and losing one's virtuosity (德).

Jiang Xichang: "Losing refers to a form of government [metaphorically referred to in the above as] 'gusts of wind' and 'violent downpours'."

6) One who obtains will also be obtained by the Dao. One who loses will also be lost to the Dao: These phrases appear in different forms in the different editions. Modified on the basis of the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] edition, which offers the best rendition of the phrases in question.

7) When there is no credibility, there will be a lack of trust: This sentence also appears in Chapter 17. I suspect it was mistakenly relocated from another chapter. The two phrases do not occur in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions.

Lu Yusan 卢育三 (b. 1926): "Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) and Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) both point out that this passage already occurs in chapter 17, and it reappears here as the result of being misplaced. It does not fit in with the context and should be omitted. Chen Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944), Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986), and Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972) agree with them. The phrases in question are both missing in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions, but appear in all other editions. If we look closely at the essential meaning of this chapter, it could be argued that it makes sense to still include this last sentence. 'Lack of credibility' refers to a form of governance which has lost the Dao, that goes against the idea that 'saying less is self-so,' implements 'much speaking', and engages in 'purposive action' (有为), which corresponds exactly with the fact that 'gusts of wind and rainstorms'[1] in human affairs cannot endure for long."

Contemporary Translation

Being sparing in issuing decrees is in accordance with natural spontaneity.

Therefore, a fierce wind cannot blow a whole morning, a downpour of rain will not last a whole day. Who causes it to be so? Heaven and earth. The violent

1 Tr. note: Lu Yusan metaphorically uses "gusts of wind and rainstorms" to refer to human affairs, perhaps sudden and violent social changes.

outbursts of heaven and earth cannot last long, let alone those of human beings.

That is why someone engaged in the Dao conforms to the Dao, someone who engages in virtuosity conforms to virtuosity, and someone who has clearly lost the Dao and virtuosity will lose everything he has. When a person's actions coincide with virtuosity (德) he will be received by the Dao, but when his actions lose their virtuosity he will be abandoned by the Dao.

When a ruler lacks sincerity, the people will naturally stop believing in him.

Argument

This chapter runs parallel with Chapter 17. Chapter 17 exposes harsh punishments and strict laws as high handed and draconian policies. Such policies only serve to cause the common people to "fear them" or "to deride them," which is why Laozi pleads to the ruler that it would be better to "value words (贵言)" and to bring relief to the people while parting from the power to oppress. In the current chapter, Laozi proceeds by highlighting the political ideal of "speaking less," which refers to being sparing in ruling via renown-authority, education, and top-down decrees and coincides with governing through "tranquility and non-action." If the ruler abides by the principle of not harassing the people, they will be calm and feel at ease, and only then will things be in accordance with what is self-so. But if the ruler restrains the people with laws and prohibitions and exploits them through exorbitant taxes and levies, then a tyrannical rule as fierce as gusts of wind and rainstorms will be instituted. Nevertheless, Laozi cautions that such a tyrannical rule will not last long.

When it comes to the results of a certain form of governing, as the popular saying goes, "like attracts like." If the ruler is tranquil and does not act, then society will repay him in kind with a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. If the ruler acts in an unhinged and lawless manner, the people will respond to this behavior by opposing and defying the ruler. If the ruler is not trustworthy enough, the common people will respond by treating him with an attitude of incredulity.

Twenty-Four

企 (1) 者不立；跨 (2) 者不行；自見者不明；自是者不彰；自伐者無功；自矜者不長。
其在道也，曰：餘食贅形 (3)。物或惡之，故有道者不處。

Those who *qi* 企 [to stand on tiptoe, hope] (1) cannot stand, those who *kua* 跨 [to stride, straddle, go across] (2) cannot walk. Those who make themselves appear remain dim, those who consider themselves as right do not shine forth, those who are conceited accomplish nothing, those who boast of themselves cannot endure.[1]

When such [attitudes] are applied to the Dao, it is described as *yu* 馀 [surplus, leftover] food *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 形 [form, shape] (3). Such things are detestable, and someone who possesses the Dao[2] does not put themselves in this position.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Qi* 企 [to stand on tiptoe, hope]: This is the same as *qi* 跂, which means standing up by raising one's heels and bending the tips of one's toes.
2) *Kua* 跨 [to stride, straddle, go across]: To leap, to jump across, to walk with big strides.
3) *Yu* 餘 [surplus, leftover] food *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 形 [form, shape]: Leftover food and useless appendages.

   In the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) and other commonly used editions, we find *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 行 [to walk, move, movement, action] instead of *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 形 [form, shape]. In their ancient forms, the characters *xing* 形 [form, shape] and *xing* 行 [to walk, move, movement, action] were used interchangeably. But because the expression *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 行 [to walk, move, movement, action] can

1 Tr. note: See the second paragraph of Chapter 22.
2 Tr. note: We sometimes translate 有道者 as being "with" the Dao or "inline" with it. "Possessing" is perhaps a more literal translation, but philosophically speaking being "with" or "in line" with the Dao makes more sense.

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easily give rise to misunderstanding, it should be changed into *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 形 [form, shape].

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "Some read *xing* 形 [form, shape] as *xing* 行 [to walk, move, movement, action], because in their ancient forms these characters were interchangeable.

Sima [Guang] 司马 [光] (d. 1086): 'Food that has been left over makes people feel sick. Obese bodies only serve to make people look ugly.'

Su [Zhe] 苏 [轍] (d. 1112) notes: 'If there is too much food and drink, people become sick. If people's limbs are obese, they will [easily] become exhausted'."

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920): "I suspect that *xing* 行 [to walk, move, movement, action] can stand for *xing* 形 [form, shape] here. *Zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 形 [form, shape] is what Wang Bi refers to as *youzhui* 疣赘 [warts, superfluities], a word which can refer to a shape or appearance (形) but not to a movement (行)" (*Laozi zhaji* 老子札记 [*Reading Notes on the Laozi*]). Yi has a point that, unlike a shape or appearance, an action cannot be described as zhui 赘. In the *Pian mu* 骈拇 [*Webbed Toes*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we read "Swollen protuberances and hanging warts, do these not come forth from the body?" (附赘县疣，出乎形哉). Since "protuberances and warts (赘疣)" stem from the body (形), it is clear that the words *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] and *xing* 形 [instead of *xing* 行] should be used together here.

The Pan Jingguan 潘静观 (d. 1692) version correctly has *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 形 [form, shape] instead of *zhui* 赘 [superfluous] *xing* 行 [to walk, move, movement, action].

Contemporary Translation

Raising your heels to stand on tiptoe, you cannot stand firm. Rushing ahead with big strides, you will not get very far. Flaunting your own opinions, you will not make yourself seen. By considering yourself to be in the right, you will not be able to shine forth. By bragging, you will not achieve success. By being conceited, you will not endure.

From the perspective of the Dao, such rash and ostentatious actions all appear as leftovers and superfluities, which serve only to disgust and irritate others. That is why people who possess the Dao do not act in such a manner.

Argument

"Standing on tiptoe you cannot stand [firm], by taking big strides you cannot walk": these are both metaphors for showing off and being conceited and arrogant. These impulsive movements are unnatural actions, they are fleeting and cannot be maintained long. This chapter not only argues that impatience and self-flaunting are unreliable, but also metaphorically indicates that rash decisions in government will be rejected by all people.

Twenty-Five

有物混成，先天地生 (1)。寂兮寥兮 (2)，獨立不改 (3)，周行而不殆 (4)，可以爲天下母 (5)。吾不知其名，強字之曰 "道" (6)，強爲之名曰 "大" (7)。大曰逝 (8)，逝曰遠，遠曰反 (9)。
故道大，天大，地大，人亦大 (10)。域中 (11) 有四大，而人居其一焉。
人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然 (12)。

There is a thing that was formed muddled and mixed, it was born before heaven and earth (1). How *ji* 寂 [lonely, quiet]! How *liao* 寥 [lonely, empty] (2), standing by itself it does not *gai* 改 [change, alter, transform] (3), *zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] *xing* 行 [proceed, go, walk] and does not *dai* 殆 [exhaust, perilous, almost] (4). It can be taken as the mother of everything under heaven (天下) (5). I do not know its name, when *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] *zi* 字 [word, letter, writing], it is called "the Dao" (6). When forced to give a name to it, it is called "great" (7). What is great is called *shi* 逝 [to pass away, to die, to flow] (8), to flow is called "to be faraway," to be faraway is called *fan* 反 [to turn over, to return, to oppose, opposite, reversal] (9).

Therefore the Dao is great, heaven is great, the earth is great, and human beings (人) also are great (10). Within *yu* 域 [region, area, domain] (11) there are four greats, and human beings occupy one place among them.

Human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao, the Dao follows the example of what is self-so (自然) (12).

Commentary and Explanation

1) There is a thing that was formed muddled and mixed, it was born before heaven and earth: The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version reads, "a 𥘅 was formed muddled and mixed" (有𥘅混成). Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version, as well as all other editions handed down since antiquity, read "there was a thing that was formed muddled and mixed" (有物混成). The same is true in the case of the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui*

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Silk Manuscript (*text B*)] versions. According to the research group in charge of the *Guodian Bamboo Slips*, the character 𥘅 might possibly be read as *dao* 道." Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 (b. 1935) thinks that "judging by its textual usage, it should be read as meaning 'state' or 'condition' (状)." (See the special issue on the *Guodian chu jian* 郭店楚简 [*Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips*] in the journal *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 [*Research in Daoist Culture*], volume 17. The two references below can be found in the same issue of this journal). Note: This character should be read as meaning "state" or "outward appearance" (象). (For more details see Zhao Jianwei 赵建伟 (b. 1957), *Guodian Laozi jian kaoshi* 郭店老子简考释 [*A Philological Study of the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]). The sentence "there was a state (shape) that was formed muddled and mixed" in the *Guodian* version comes closer to the original significance of Laozi's philosophy than "there was a thing that was formed muddled in mixed" in the received editions. (See Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植 (b. 1947), *Guodian zhujian Laozi shixi yu yanjiu* 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*An Analysis and Study of the Guodian Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]).

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004): "Laozi managed to make short work of the notion that heaven is the supreme principle governing everything there is. Even though the age of Laozi preceded that of Mencius, the latter continued to pass on traditional concepts, while revising and further developing them. Laozi on the other hand had initiated a veritable conceptual revolution. For Laozi, heaven is not what is most essential, since there is still that which constitutes the foundation of heaven. Laozi says: 'There is a thing that was formed muddled and mixed, it was born before heaven and earth.' This means that what is most essential is the Dao. It is the Dao which came before all else."

2) How *ji* 寂 [lonely, quiet]! How *liao* 寥 [lonely, empty]: "How *ji* 寂 [lonely, quiet]" means remaining still and soundless. "How *liao* 寥 [lonely, empty]" means moving and shapeless (According to Yan Lingfeng's 严灵峰 (d. 1999) interpretation).

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) notes: "*Ji* 寂 [lonely, quiet] means without sound. *Liao* 寥 [lonely, empty] means empty and without shape."

3) Standing by itself it does not *gai* 改 [change, alter, transform]: A description of the absolute and eternal nature of the Dao. The *Guodian* version has "*hai* 亥 [twelfth sign of the zodiac, pig, boar]" instead of "*gai* 改 [change, alter, transform]."

4) *Zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] *xing* 行 [proceed, go, walk] and does not *dai* 殆 [exhaust, perilous, almost]: This sentence is missing

in both the *Guodian* and the *Mawangdui* versions. There are two possible interpretations of the phrase '*zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] *xing* 行 [proceed, go, walk]': Firstly, to move around everywhere, so that the character *zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] is read as meaning universal or omnipresent. As Wang Bi notes: "*Zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] *xing* 行 [proceed, go, walk] means that there is nowhere it does not reach." Secondly, as moving in cycles, in which case the word *zhou* 周 [circumference, circle, all, attentive] is read as meaning "revolving". I have followed the second line of interpretation in my contemporary rendition. Not *dai* 殆 [exhaust, perilous, almost] means ceaseless. *Dai* 殆 [exhaust, perilous, almost] is interchangeable with *dai* 怠 [idle, lazy, negligent].

5) The mother of everything under heaven (天下): The *Mawangdui* and Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) versions read "mother of heaven and earth." Fan Yingyuan notes: "Ancient editions originally have the words 'heaven and earth', while some [current] versions read 'mother of everything under heaven'. We should give preference to the ancient editions." However, the *Guodian* version speaks in favor of the phrase "mother of everything under heaven," as does Wang Bi's version.

6) When *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] *zi* 字 [word, letter, writing], it is called "the Dao": In the most commonly used editions, the word "*qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior]" is missing before "*zi* 字 [word, letter, writing]." The Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Li Yue 李约 (d. 806) version, and the Fan Yingyuan version include the character *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior]. This lacuna should be amended on the basis of these editions.

Fan Yingyuan: "The Wang Bi version is consistent with other ancient editions. In the Heshang Gong version, the character *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] does not appear in this phrase. The ancient editions are to be preferred here."

Liu Shipei 刘师培 (d. 1919): "Note: In the chapter *Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining the Laozi*] of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] we read: 'The sage observes its dark vacuity and employs its cyclical progression, when *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] *zi* 字 [word, letter, writing], it is called the Dao.' This suggests that the character *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] should be included before '*zi* 字 [word, letter, writing]' which makes it consistent with the phrase 'forcing to apply a name to it (强为之名)' that follows immediately after in the text of the *Laozi*. This character is missing in current editions." (*Laozi jiaobu* 老子斠补 [*Collations and Emendations to the Laozi*].)

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920): "Note: in the 17th volume of the *Zhouyi jijie* 周易集解 [*Collected Commentaries on the Book of Changes*], Gan Bao 干宝 (d. 336) is quoted as saying: 'In the *Laozi* we read, "I do not know its name, when forced to apply a word it, it is called the Dao".' Here the character *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] occurs before *zi* 字 [word, letter, writing]."

On the basis of the above remarks, we can ascertain that the word *qiang* 强 [force, strong, energetic, superior] originally appeared in Wang Bi's version, but was omitted during the copying process. This lacuna has been amended here on the basis of Fu Yi's version.

7) Great (大): Describes the fact that the Dao has no boundaries and is all-encompassing.

8) Is called *shi* 逝 [to pass away, to die, to flow]: This and the other two instances of the word "to be called (曰)" can be interpreted as the conjunctions "and (而)" or "if [...] then (则)." *Shi* 逝 [to pass away, to die, to flow] refers to the progression of the Dao, to its ceaselessly flowing and revolving movement (周行).

Wang Bi: "*Shi* 逝 [to pass away, to die, to flow] means to *xing* 行 [proceed, go, walk]."

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "*Shi* 逝 [to pass away, to die, to flow] means to flow on without coming to a halt."

Zhang Dainian: "'Greatness' refers precisely to the Dao, which is the principle behind what flows away. This flowing movement stems from its greatness, and reaches ever further into the distance as it continues to flow. The universe is nothing but an indefinite process of this endless flow." (*Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*Outline of Chinese Philosophy*].)

9) *Fan* 反 [to turn over, to return, to oppose, opposite, reversal]: This word is used in two different ways in the *Laozi*: as "to return (返)" or as "to be contrary to (相反)," such as for example in Chapter 78: "Right words seem contrary." In this chapter it means "to return."

Che Zai 车载 (d. 1970): "*Fan* 反 [to turn over, to return, to oppose, opposite, reversal] has two different meanings: apart from meaning 'to be opposed and contrary to', it can also refer to the notion of 'returning to the root and *ming* 命 [life, destiny, mandate]'.[1] Both meanings play a crucial role in the *Laozi*."

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1 Tr. note: The notion of "returning to the root and *ming* 命 (归根复命)" is an idea from Chapter 16 of the *Laozi*. See Chapter 16 for more.

Qian Zhongshu 钱锺书 (d. 1998): "*Fan* 反 [to turn over, to return, to oppose, opposite, reversal] has two different meanings: firstly it can mean the opposite of 'correct' or 'right' (正), that is to say, 'to run counter to (违反)'. Secondly, it can refer to the opposite of 'going toward', that is to say, to 'returning' (回反) (the character *hui* 回 [return, turn around, surround] has these two different meanings as well: 'to run counter to' or 'to return', with the latter sense being most common) [...] In the *Laozi*, these two different meanings of *fan* 反 [to turn over, to return, to oppose, opposite, reversal] are combined to refer to the synthesis (合) of a thesis (正) and antithesis (反)." (*Guan zhui pian* 管锥篇 [*Pipe-Awl Collection*], volume 2, p. 445.)

Feng Dafu 冯达甫 (d. 1997): "The words 'great', 'flowing', 'faraway', and 'returning' provide a complete description of the developmental process of the Dao." (*Laozi yizhu* 老子译注 [*A Contemporary Translation of the Laozi with Annotations*].)

Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie) 陈荣捷 (d. 1994): "The notion of returning to the origin occupies a rather prominent position in the *Laozi*. It exerted a considerable influence on the cyclical conception of development that is ubiquitous among Chinese people. According to this conception, the functioning of the Dao and of history follows a cyclical pattern."

10) Human beings (人) also are great: Laozi was the first Chinese philosopher to unambiguously state that human beings occupy a special position (according to Zhang Dainian in his *Outline of Chinese Philosophy*). If we consult the Wang Bi version, this phrase originally read "the king (王) also is great." Both the Fu Yi version and the Fan Yingyuan version have "human beings (人)" instead of "king (王)."

Fan Yingyuan: "The word 'human beings (人)' occurs in the Fu Yi version as well as other ancient editions. Heshang Gong's version has 'king' instead. In the context of the Heshang Gong commentary, the word 'king' refers to a person most worthy of respect and expresses a sense of reverence for the ruler. However, the next phrase 'human beings follow the example of the earth' [has "human beings" as its subject, which is the same in all the versions], therefore, the ancient versions enjoy better coherence, [since they have "human beings" as the subject in the two adjacent lines]. Moreover, human beings are presented as the most intelligent of the myriad things and are named together with heaven and earth as one of the 'three capacities (三才)'. If they are assigned to carry on the Dao, then human beings must be great indeed." (*Laozi daodejing*

guben jijie 老子道德经古本集解 [*Collection and Commentary on Ancient Editions of Laozi's Daodejing*].)

Wu Chengzhi 吴承志 (d. 1917) notes: "In the section on the character for 'great (大) (in the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*]), we read: 'Great: heaven is great, the earth is great, human beings too are great. Hence, a description of a tall human stature.' The ancient editions on which Xu 许 [慎 Shen] (d. 148 BCE) based himself read 'human beings (人)' instead of 'king (王)'. This is corroborated by the passage further on in the text of the *Laozi*, namely, 'human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao', where we also find the word 'human beings'. The character *ren* 人 was written as *san* 三 [three] in the ancient script, which led to some misreading it as *wang* 王 [king]."

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) writes: "The two occurrences of the character 'human beings (人)' have been replaced by 'king (王)' in this chapter. In the chapter *Dao ying xun* 道应训 [*Lessons on Responding to the Dao*] from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*], the quotations from this chapter in the *Laozi* also read 'king (王)'. In both cases, the mistaken substitution of 'king (王)' for 'human beings (人)' was probably due to the reverence for the ruler in ancient times and does not reflect the original text of the *Laozi*. [...] The *Laozi* approaches the Dao as the mother of heaven and earth, which is why its greatness is stressed first. If 'human beings' is replaced by 'king', the meaning of the text becomes too restrictive. Fortunately, the character 'human beings (人)' remained unchanged in the phrase 'human beings (人) follow the example of the earth' further on in the text, which provides us with additional evidence for our reading."

Yan Lingfeng: "Consider the parallel between the phrase 'and the king occupies one place among them (而王居一焉)' further on in the text and the passage in the *Qiushui* 秋水 [*Autumn Floods*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] which reads, 'we speak of things, as numbering ten thousand, and *human beings* occupy only one place among them (人处一焉).' This increases the likelihood that the word 'king' should be replaced with 'human beings' here as well. In the chapter *Tai shi* 泰誓 [*Great Declaration*] in the *Shangshu* 尚书 [*Book of Documents*] it says: 'Human beings are the most intelligent of the myriad things.' In the *Xiaojing* 孝经 [*Classics of Filial Piety*] we read: 'Of all things in heaven and earth, human beings are the most noble in nature.' Finally, in the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 [*Writings of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity*] it says: 'Of all living things endowed with intelligence, none

can surpass human beings.' Since human beings are considered to be the most intelligent of all things, the latter should be represented by the word 'human beings', not by the word 'king'. Additionally, Fan Yingyuan's and Fu Yi's versions both read 'human beings'. The text should be amended on the basis of these editions." (*Laozi dajie* 老子达解 [*Comprehensive Interpretation of the Laozi*].)

Note: The two occurrences of the word "king (王)" in this chapter have been replaced by "human beings (人)" on the basis of Fu Yi's version. The received versions mistakenly read "king (王)" simply due to, as Xi Dong put it, "the reverence for the ruler in ancient times." Another reason, as put forward by Wu Chengzhi, might have been that the character for *ren* 人 [person, human beings] was written as *san* 三 [three] in the ancient script, leading some misreading it as "king (王)." The passage that follows says: "human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao." Hence, the word "king (王)" should be replaced with "human beings (人)" in order to better match the whole context and run parallel with the phrase "human beings follow the example of the earth."

11) Within *yu* 域 [region, area, domain]: Within space, or what we now commonly refer to as the universe.

Tang Yijie 汤一介 (d. 2014) notes: "The Dao discussed in the *Laozi* existed before heaven and earth. This simply means that it existed before them in a temporal sense, not that it is logically prior to heaven and earth. Although the Dao of which Laozi speaks has no shape or outward appearance, it does not transcend space. Rather, it has no specific or determinate form. Only in this way can the Dao be transformed into heaven, earth, and the myriad things with a specific and determinate form.

In Laozi's view, 'the Dao', 'heaven', 'earth', and 'human beings' are the 'four great things' in the universe. If these four were heterogenous entities, it would make no sense classifying them [in the same category] together as the 'four greats'. Moreover, the fact that Laozi says that 'human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao, the Dao follows the example of what is self-so' also serves to make clear that there is no fundamental difference between how 'human beings take the earth as their standard' on the one hand and how 'heaven takes the Dao as its standard' on the other. Even though the Dao is the origin which produces heaven, earth, and the myriad things, this does not necessarily imply that it transcends time and space." (Quoted in *Laozi zhexue taolun ji* 老子哲学讨论集 [*Collected Discussions on the Philosophy of the Laozi*], p. 149.)

12) The Dao follows the example of what is self-so (自然): The Dao purely relies on what is self-so, it is simply what it is.

Heshang Gong: "The Dao takes what is self-so as its nature, it does not follow the example of anything at all."

Dong Sijing 董思靖 (13th century; dates unknown): "The Dao runs through the three capacities (三才), it is simply self-so by essence." (*Daodejing jijie* 道德经集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Daodejing*].)

Wu Cheng: "The reason why the Dao is great is because it is self-so, which is why the text says that it 'follows the example of what is self-so'. It is not that there is something self-so apart from and outside of the Dao." (*Daodejing zhu* 道德经注 [*Annotations to the Daodejing*].)

Che Zai: "The phrase 'the Dao follows the example of what is self-so' means that the Dao has to follow the example of 'non-action (无为)." (*Lun Laozi* 论老子 [*On the Laozi*].)

Tong Shuye 童书业 (d. 1968): "The idea of what is self-so in the *Laozi* means what is so out of itself. The phrase 'the Dao follows the example of what is self-so' means that the latter is the essence of the Dao." (*Xianqin qi zi sixiang yanjiu* 先秦七子思想研究 [*A Study of Seven Pre-Qin Masters*], p. 113.)

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990) notes: "'Human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao, the Dao follows the example of what is self-so.' (Chapter 25 of the *Laozi*). This does not at all mean that there is something 'self-so' elevated above the Dao after which the latter is patterned. Earlier on in the text we read that 'there are four great things within the region', namely, the Dao, heaven, earth, and human beings. The term 'self-so' simply refers to the non-purposive and unconscious manner in which the Dao generates the myriad things. 'Self-so' is an adjective and does not at all denote some discrete entity. That is why the text speaks of four and not five 'greats'. Laozi's notion that 'the Dao follows the example of what is self-so' clearly runs counter to teleological approaches."

Contemporary Translation

There is a mixed and indistinguishable thing, before heaven and earth were formed it already existed. Its sounds are inaudible, nor can its shape be seen. It lasts forever independently without ever ceasing, it moves around in circular motions and ceaselessly creates, and it is capable of being the root and source

of heaven and earth and the ten thousands things. I do not know its name and reluctantly call it "the Dao," if I would further be forced to give it a name, it would be "great." It is boundless and flows without ever halting; flowing without ever halting, it stretches out into the distance; stretching out into the distance, it then turns back to the origin.

That is why it is said: the Dao is great, heaven is great, the earth is great, and human beings too are great. There are four great things in the universe, and human beings are one of these four.

Human beings pattern themselves after the earth, the earth patterns itself after heaven, heaven patters itself after the Dao, the Dao relies only on what is self-so.

Argument

This chapter describes a number of crucial aspects of the essential reality and practical functioning of the Dao.

1) "There is a thing that was formed muddled and mixed": This describes the Dao as in a state of simplicity. The Dao does not consist of different elements nor is made of different parts. Rather, it is a self-sufficient and harmonious substance (体). As opposed to the manifoldness and multiplicity of the phenomenal world, it is an infinite, perfect, and unlimited totality.
2) The Dao is an absolute substance (体) that is free from oppositions. All things in the realm of the phenomenal are relative to one another. By contrast, the Dao itself is wholly singular. This is why the text says that it "stands by itself and does not change." The Dao is something mobile, going around in cycles while ceaselessly flowing on ("passing away", 逝). However, it will not disappear along with these transformations.
3) The Dao is soundless and shapeless ("How still! How empty!"). As Wang Bi aptly notes, "with names, shapes are determined; something that is formed muddled and mixed cannot be determined." As a matter of fact, it is unnamable, and we can only force ourselves to name it with great difficulty.
4) The Dao not only existed before heaven and earth, the myriad things in the world were also produced by it ("it was born before heaven and earth," "it is the mother of everything under heaven").
5) The Dao proceeds cyclically. In all its movements, coming to an end leads to another beginning, so that renewal can start again.

6) The "greatness" that is used to offer a forced description of the Dao ("when forced to give a name to it, it is called 'great'") refers to something of which the scope extends indefinitely. There are four great things in the universe: apart from the Dao, the text also goes on to add heaven, earth, and human beings to the list. What is so valuable about these "four greats" is that they embody what is self-so in their functioning. When we read in the text that "the Dao follows the example of what is self-so", this means that the Dao coincides with what is self-so, the essence of the Dao is precisely what is self-so. The notion of what is "self-so" expresses the basic spirit of Laozi's philosophy.

Twenty-Six

重爲輕根，靜爲躁君。
是以君子 (1) 終日行不離輜重 (2)。雖有榮觀 (3)，燕處 (4) 超然。奈何萬乘之主 (5)，而以身輕天下 (6)？
輕則失根 (7)，躁則失君。

Zhong 重 [heavy, weighty] is the *gen* 根 [root, foundation] for *qing* 轻 [light, frivolous], stillness is the ruler of rashness.

This is why the *junzi* 君子 [gentleman, exemplary person] (1) travels all day without leaving his *zi* 辎 [supply cart, wagon] *zhong* 重 [heavy, weighty]. (2) Although they have *rong* 荣 [glory, honor, to thrive] *guan* 观 [view, watch, sight, watchtower] (3) *yan* 燕 [joyful, leisurely] *chu* 处 [reside, dwell, to be in] (4) and remains *chaoran* 超然 [aloof, detached]. So how can a lord of ten thousand *sheng* 乘 [carriage, chariot] (5) [make] light [of] (轻) himself [while governing] the world? (6)

In lightness then the *gen* 根 [root, foundation] is lost (7), in rashness sovereignty is forfeited.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Junzi* 君子 [gentleman, exemplary person]: The Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version originally read "sage (圣人)." The Jing Long era stele version, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112) version, the Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, as well as many other ancient editions from the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1276) periods all have *junzi* 君子. In the chapter *Yu Lao* 喻老 [*Illustration of the Laozi*] of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] we also read *junzi* 君子 [gentleman, exemplary person], which corresponds exactly with what we find in the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)].

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) notes: "The term '*junzi*' 君子 [gentleman, exemplary person] refers to high-ranking ministers (卿), senior officials (大夫), and low-ranking officials (士), see the annotation[1] of the chapter *Xiang yin jiu yi* 乡饮酒义 [*Meaning of the Drinking Ceremonies in the Districts*] in

1 Tr. note: Here Xi Dong refers to Zheng Xuan's 郑玄 (d. 200) annotation.

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the *Liji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*]. The term '*junzi*' is in contrast to what is called 'a lord of ten thousand chariots' further on in the text."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) remarks: "The 'sage' is an ideal ruler, who must lead a life of seclusion and transform the people through 'non-action.' They should not practice the Dao all day long or [even] constantly handle the business of transporting supplies in the army [which is the job of a *junzi*], thus here it is better to use the term a *junzi* 君子. So [Wang Bi's text] should be rectified on the basis of the other available editions." Jiang is right, amended to *junzi* 君子 here on the basis of the *Hanfeizi* and the *Mawangdui* edition.

2) *Zi* 辎 [supply cart, wagon] *zhong* 重 [heavy, weighty]: An army wagon carrying weapons and food.

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) changes *zi* 辎 [supply cart, wagon] *zhong* 重 [heavy, weighty] into *jing zhong* 静重 [still and heavy] and notes: "Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: '*Zi* 辎 [supply cart, wagon] means *jing* 静 [still, quiet]. The sage practices the Dao all day long without ever leaving his "stillness" and "weightiness".' This is absolutely correct. Heshang Gong pairs *jing* 静 [still, quiet] with *zhong* 重 [heavy, weighty] [...] This is corroborated by the conjunction of *jing* 静 [still, quiet], *zhong* 重 [heavy, weighty], *qing* 轻 [light, frivolous], and *zao* 躁 [rash] in the first and last sentences of this chapter. I suspect that the text originally read *jing zhong* 静重, but came to be mistakenly rendered as *qing* 轻 [重] because *qing* 轻 [light, frivolous] sounds similar to *jing* 静 [still, quiet], and also because the first sentence reads 'what is heavy is the root for what is light (重为轻根).' The Japanese edition by Ariki Genkichi 有木元吉[2] precisely uses *qing* 轻 [light, frivolous] here, as is also the case in the Yuan Dong'an 源东庵 version. Later on, *qing* 轻 [light, frivolous] was further changed into *zi* 辎 [supply cart, wagon] due to the similarity between these two characters." I have provided Yan's comments here for further reference.

3) *Rong* 荣 [glory, honor, to thrive] *guan* 观 [to view, watch, sight, grand building]: Refers to a life of splendor. *Rong* 荣 means splendor and grandness, *guan* 观 refers to a lofty terrace or tower.

4) *Yan* 燕 [joyful, leisurely] *chu* 处 [reside, dwell, to be in]: To live peacefully.

2 Tr. note: Author of the work *Rōshi seigi* 老子正义 [*True Meaning of the Laozi*] from 1787.

Lin Yixi notes: "*Yan* 燕 [joyful, leisurely] means peacefully, *chu* 处 [reside, dwell, to be in] means to reside."

5) A lord of ten thousand *sheng* 乘 [carriage, chariot]: Refers to the ruler of a great state. *Sheng* 乘 [carriage, chariot] denotes a number of chariots. "Ten thousand chariots" refers to a large state with a military force of ten thousand chariots.

6) [Make] light (轻) [of] himself [while governing] the world: Assuming responsibility for the world while neglecting one's own life.

Heshang Gong comments: "A ruler is the most dignified of all, how can he allow himself to act rashly? [From this passage, we know that Laozi] hates the rulers of his time who were extravagant, wanton, frivolous, and licentious."

Su Zhe notes: "When the sovereign personally assumes responsibility for the world while neglecting himself, he does not have what it takes to assume responsibility for the world."

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) remarks: "[Making] light [of] oneself [while governing] the world means allowing oneself to be rash and careless [while in a position that is] above everything under heaven."

7) *Gen* 根 [root, foundation]: The Wang Bi version has *ben* 本 [root, origin]. The Heshang Gong version and many other ancient editions have *chen* 臣 [servant, minister]. The version with *ben* 本 [root, origin] is acceptable, but the introduction of *chen* 臣 [servant, minister] is a mistake. Amended to *gen* 根 [root, foundation] on the basis of the *Yongle dadian* 永乐大典 [*Yongle Encyclopedia*] and the remarks by Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907).

Yu Yue comments: "In the *Yongle dadian*, this phrase is rendered as 'in lightness the root (根) is lost', which should be adopted. Since the first sentence of this chapter reads 'heaviness is the root for lightness, stillness is the ruler of rashness', it makes sense that the final lines read 'in lightness then the root is lost, in rashness sovereignty is forfeited.' This means that without weight/significance/importance one will be without roots, and without stillness one will lack sovereignty." We should follow Yu's remarks and change *ben* 本 into *gen* 根 [root, foundation] for the sake of coherence with the opening lines. The Wu Cheng version and the Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) version precisely read *gen* 根.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) notes: "'In lightness then the root is lost, in rashness sovereignty is forfeited': this means that when the ruler gives free rein to his desires and neglects himself, he will lose the root of self-cultivation and that rashly striving after accomplishments leads to the loss of the Dao of rulership."

Contemporary Translation

Decorum is the foundation of rashness, serenity is the commander of impetuousness.

That is why the exemplary person travels all day without leaving the supply wagon. Although he leads a life of splendor, he remains calm and composed. Why would the ruler of a great state govern the world through rash and impetuous action?

Through rashness, he loses the foundation; through impetuousness, he loses his self-control/autonomy.

Argument

This chapter discusses "stillness and weightiness" and criticizes "frivolity and rashness." A frivolous and rash mode of conduct resembles a kite whose string has been cut off. For establishing oneself and conducting business, nothing good can come out of rash action and erratic behavior. Laozi is troubled by the extravagant, licentious, debauched, and self-destructive behavior of the rulers of his own time, which is why he exclaims "how can a lord of ten thousand chariots [make] light [of] himself [while governing] the world?" There is profound grief in this exclamation. The ruler of a state should be capable of stillness and weightiness instead of acting in a frivolous and rash manner.

Twenty-Seven

善行無轍跡 (1)；善言 (2) 無瑕讁 (3)；善數 (4) 不用籌策 (5)；善閉無關楗 (6) 而不可開；善結無繩約 (7) 而不可解。
是以聖人常善救人，故無棄人；常善救物，故無棄物。是謂襲明 (8)。故善人者，不善人之師；不善人者，善人之資 (9)。不貴其師，不愛其資，雖智大迷，是謂要妙 (10)。

One who excels at walking has no *zhe* 轍 [rut, track] *ji* 迹 [mark, imprint, trace] (1); one who excels at speaking (2) has no *xia* 瑕 [flaw, blemish] *zhe* 讁 [fault, blame] (3); one who excels at *shu* 数 [to count, number] (4) does not use *chou* 筹 [counting instrument, to count] *ce* 策 [bamboo or wooden slip] (5); one who excels at locking has no *guan* 关 [to close, lock] *jian* 楗 [door bolt] (6), yet it cannot be opened; one who is good at tying has no *sheng* 绳 [rope, cord] *yue* 约 [to restrict, restrain] (7), yet it cannot be untied.

And so the sage always excels at helping others, therefore there is no one deserted; he constantly excels at helping things, therefore there is nothing abandoned. This is called *xi* 袭 [to carry on, continue, conceal] *ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence] (8).

That is why those who excel [in something] are the teachers of those who do not excel [in something];[1] and those who do not excel [in something] *zi* 资 [to provide, supply, rely on] (9) for those who excel [in something]. When a person does not value his teachers and does not love what he avails himself of, although he is wise, he will be greatly lost. This is what is called *yao* 要 [important, essential] *miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden] (10).

1 Tr. note: According to Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018), the *Boshu jia* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] has "故善人者, 善人之师." In comparison with the received version "善人者, 不善人之师," the character "不" is missing. "Even though there is only one character missing, the meanings of the two texts differ significantly." By referring to the relevant discussion from the *Jielaopian* 解老篇 [*Explaining the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*], Gao Ming argues that "the received version is erroneous, while the silk version is correct." For the detailed argument, see *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛书老子校注 [*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi*], pp. 367–368.

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Commentary and Explanation

1) *Zhe* 辙 [rut, track] *ji* 迹 [mark, imprint, trace]: *Zhe* 辙 is the track of a wheel, ji 迹 are footprints or hoof prints.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) notes: "*Zheji* 辙迹 [tracks and prints] has the same meaning as 'marks'."

2) One who excels at speaking: Refers to someone who is adept at carrying out a "teaching of not to speak (不言之教)." (Chapter 2)

3) *Xia* 瑕 [flaw, blemish] *zhe* 謫 [fault, blame]: Error, shortcoming.

Fan Yingyuang 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) notes: "*Xia* 瑕 is a flaw in a piece of jade. *Zhe* 謫 means to punish or reproach."

In [Lu Deming's 陆德明 (d. 630)] [*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 [*Textual Explanations of the Classics*], in the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, the Fan Yingyuan version, and other ancient editions, *zhe* 謫 is written *zhe* 谪.

4) *Shu* 数 [to count, number]: To count or calculate.

The Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version, the Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112) version, the Lin Xiyi version, and the Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) version have *ji* 计 [to count, calculate] instead of *shu* 数 [to count, number]. Fan Yingyuan remarks: "Just as the other ancient editions, Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 240) has *shu* 数 [to count, number] here."

5) *Chou* 筹 [counting instrument, to count, calculate] *ce* 策 [bamboo or wooden slip]: An ancient counting device.

6) *Guan* 关 [to close, lock] *jian* 楗 [door bolt]: A door bolt. Written *guanyue* 关龠 in the *Mawangdui* versions.

Dong Sijing 董思靖 (Song Dynasty; dates unknown) notes: "*Jian* 楗 [door bolt] is a piece of wood used to bolt a door. When placed horizontally it is called *guan* 关 [to close, lock], when positioned vertically it is called *jian* 楗."

In various ancient editions, *jian* 楗 [door bolt] is written *jian* 键 [key, bond]. But Fan Yingyuan and Bi Yuan 毕沅 (d. 1797) still think *jian* 楗 [door bolt] is the right version.

Fan Yingyuan remarks: "*Jian* 楗 [door bolt] is a piece of wood used to bolt a door. Some versions use the radical *jin* 金 on the left-hand side of the character, which is a mistake. When placed horizontally, it is called g*uan* 关 [to close, lock], when positioned vertically it is called *jian* 楗 [door bolt]."

Bi Yuan notes: "In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] we read: '*Jian* 楗 [door bolt] means door bolt.' Here

the same character is used and should not be replaced with *jian* 键 [key, bond], which refers to the linchpin of a wheel."

7) *Sheng* 绳 [rope, cord] *yue* 约 [to restrict, restrain]: A rope. *Yue* 约 [to restrict, restrain] also means "rope" or "cord" here.

Wu Cheng notes: "*Sheng* 绳 [rope, cord] *yue* 约 [to restrict, restrain] means rope. *Sheng* 绳 [rope, cord] refers to what has been twisted into one body, *yue* 约 [to restrict, restrain] refers to the function of bundling things together with it [a rope]."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) remarks: "In the chapter *Ji xi ji* 既夕记 [*Rites of the Evening*] in the *Yili* 仪礼 [*Book of Rites*] there is the phrase '*sui* 绥 [carriage handle] and bridle are both made of rope (约绥约辔).' Zheng [Xuan] 郑 [玄] (d. 200) comments: '*Yue* 约 [to restrict, restrain] is a rope.'"

8) *Xi* 袭 [to carry on, continue, conceal] *ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence]: To contain "*ming* 明." *Xi* 袭 [to carry on, continue, conceal] means to inherit, and it can denote preserving or containing. *Ming* 明 [brightness, clarity, intelligence] refers to understanding the wisdom of the Dao. The sentence preceding the phrase *xi ming* 袭明 [preserving clarity], "he excels at helping things, therefore there is nothing abandoned," reads "among the things nothing worthy (talented)" in the *Mawangdui* versions.

Shi Deqing notes: "By carrying on one's original clarity, one opens up what is concealed, that is why the text says 'to preserve clarity (袭明).' *Xi* 袭 [to carry on, continue, conceal] means to carry on or inherit (承) and has the same meaning as *yin* 因 [to carry on]"

Xi Tong 奚侗 (d. 1939) comments: "*Xi* 袭 [to carry on, continue, conceal] means *yin* 因 [to carry on]. *Ming* 明 is the 'clarity' from the phrase 'knowing constancy is called clarity' (知明曰常) in Chapters 16 and 55. *Xi ming* 袭明 [preserving clarity] means to follow the constant Dao."

9) *Zi* 资 [to provide, supply, rely on]: Means to make use of or to avail oneself of something.

10) *Yao* 要 [important, essential] *miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden]: Essential and mysterious.

Heshang Gong comments: "Grasping the meaning [of this chapter] is called 'knowing the subtle and essential Dao'."

Wu Cheng notes: "*Yao* 要 [important, essential] has the same meaning as ultimate or utmost. *Miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden] means what is dark and unfathomable. What is dark and unfathomable to the utmost degree is called *yaomiao* 要妙."

Gao Heng remarks: "I suspect *yao* 要 [subtle, hidden] should be *you* 幽 [dusky, remote, secluded]. *You* 幽 [dusky, remote, secluded] *miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden] means 'profound and subtle'. The characters *yao* 要 [subtle, hidden] and *you* 幽 [dusky, remote, secluded] were used interchangeably in ancient times."

Liu Taigong 刘台拱 (d. 1805) notes: "*Yao* 要 [subtle, hidden] *miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden] is the same as *you* 幽 [dusky, remote, secluded] *miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden]. In the chapter *Ben jing* 本经 [*Essential Scriptures*] from the *Huainan*[*zi*] 淮南 [子] [*Writings of Master Huainan*] there is the phrase 'in order to fully see through what is profound and subtle (要妙).' In the *Ji Zhu* 集注 [*Collected Annotations*] [i.e., Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (d. 1200) *Chu ci ji zhu* 楚辞集注 (*The Collected Annotations of the Verses of Chu*)], there is the following comment on this phrase: '*Yaomiao* 要妙 refers to what appears as profound and far-reaching.'" [Quoted in Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972), *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校释 (*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Laozi*)].

Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司 (d. 2001) notes: "*Yao* 要 [subtle, hidden] *miao* 妙 [subtle, hidden] has the same meaning as 'profound and subtle (窈眇)', that is to say, profound truth."

Contemporary Translation

Someone who is adept at walking does not leave any traces behind. Someone who is adept at speaking makes no mistakes. Someone who is adept at calculating does not use a counter. Someone who is adept at closing does not use a bolt, but still no one will manage to open it. Someone who is adept at binding does not use a rope, yet no one will be able to untie it.

Therefore, a person who has the Dao always excels at allowing others to use their talents to the utmost, so that no one is left behind. [A person who embodies the Dao] always excels at making sure things fully perform their function, so that nothing is abandoned. This is what is called the realm of preserving clarity.

That is why a good person can be the teacher of a bad person and why a bad person can serve as an example for a good person. When someone does not respect his teachers and does not cherish what he can learn from others, he may consider himself to be clever, but actually he is utterly deceived. This is truly an essential and profound principle.

Argument

This chapter is a further elaboration on the ideas of what is *ziran* 自然 [self-so] and of *wu wei* 无为 [non-action].

The expressions "being adept at speaking" and "being adept at walking" refer to excelling in carrying out a "teaching of not to speak (不言之教)." (Chapter 2) and in governing through non-action. "Being adept at counting", "being adept at closing", and "being adept at tying" are metaphors with a similar sense. These phrases all mean that, to quote Lin Xiyi, "when one follows what is self-so as the Dao, then one has nothing to exert influence on, and leaves no traces." These expressions are also metaphors for the fact that when a person who possesses the Dao governs the state, they do not need to perform any tangible actions, but are able to see the value in letting things be while remaining unseen. Someone in possession of the Dao is capable of employing a wisdom of primordial clarity in observing people and things and understands that people all have their own talents and all things have their own function. Moreover, they make sure that each person can make full use of their abilities and achieve something on the basis of their own nature. That is why the text says that [the sage] "always excels at helping others" and "there is no one deserted." He or she also ensures that things can fully perform their function and goes well with the nature of things in order to unfold their capacities. That is why the text says, "[the sage] constantly excels at helping things" and "there is nothing abandoned". This clarifies how someone who embodies the Dao comports himself towards others and towards things.

In this chapter, we do not only get a description of the fact that someone who embodies the Dao treats others and things by adapting himself or herself to what is self-so. It gives even stronger expression to the emotional attitude of such a person, who never turns his or her back on people and things. A person with this attitude is able to treat all people with kindness, regardless of whether they are good or bad. Especially when it comes to bad people, he or she does not show any disdain for them because they are not good. On the one hand, such people have to be encountered. On the other hand, they can also serve as an example for good people.

Twenty-Eight

知其雄，守其雌 (1)，爲天下谿 (2)。爲天下谿，常德不離，復歸於嬰兒。
知其白，〔守其黑，爲天下式。爲天下式，常德不忒，復歸於無極。
知其榮 (3)，〕守其辱，爲天下穀。爲天下穀，常德乃足，復歸於樸。
樸散則爲器 (4)，聖人用之 (5)，則爲官長 (6)，故大制不割 (7)。

Know the *xiong* 雄 [male, powerful, robust], preserve the *ci* 雌 [female, weak, gentle] (1), be the *xi* 谿 [brook, stream] (2) of the world. By being the brook of the world, constant *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy] will not desert you, and you will return to infancy.

Know the white, [preserve the black, be a model unto the world. By being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err and you will return to the utmost of *wu* 无 (non-presence, non-being). Know the *rong* 荣 (glory, honor) (3)] preserve the *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor], and be the valley of the world. By being the valley of the world, constant efficacy will be sufficient, and you will return to *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, uncarved wood].

When *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, uncarved wood] is split, it is made into *qi* 器 [utensil, instrument] (4), but when the sage uses it (5), then he fashions it into *guanzhang* 官长 [commanding official] (6), and therefore great workmanship is done without any cutting (大制不割) (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Know the *xiong* 雄 [male, powerful, robust], preserve the *ci* 雌 [female, weak, gentle]: *Xiong* 雄 [male, powerful, robust] is a metaphor for strength, vigor, and rashness. *Ci* 雌 [female, weak, gentle] is a metaphor for gentleness and modesty.
2) *Xi* 谿 [brook, stream]: Same as *xi* 徯, meaning a small pathway (*xijing* 徯径 is also written *xijing* 蹊径). This means that silently preserving female stillness is the path the world should follow.

   If *xi* 谿 is interpreted as "valley" (*xigu* 溪谷), it would be a repetition of the character *gu* 谷 [valley] later on in the text.
3) Preserve the black, be a model unto the world. By being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err and you will return to the utmost of

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wu 无 [non-presence, non-being]. Know the *rong* 荣 [glory, honor]: This whole passage is suspected of being a later interpolation.

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920) comments: "Note: This chapter contains a later interpolation, and [thus] is not entirely the original text of the *Laozi*. In the chapter *Tianxia* 天下 [*All under Heaven*] of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], Lao Dan 老聃 is quoted as saying: 'Knowing the male while preserving the female, be the pathway of the world. Know the white, preserve *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor], be the valley of the world.' This is the original text of the *Laozi*. Here we see that the 'male' is contrasted with the 'female' and the 'white' with '*ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor].' The latter means 'black' here. In the annotations to [the chapter *Shi hunli* 士昏礼 [*Marriage Rites of the Scholar-Officials*] [of] the *Yili* 仪礼 [*Book of Rites*], there is the following phrase: 'When what is white is placed in what is black, it is called *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor or smeared, dirty] (以白造缁曰辱).' This can serve as proof for the ancient use of *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] as 'black.' Because people were no longer aware of the fact that *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] meant the opposite of 'white', they thought that only the words 'black' and 'honor' could stand in contrast with 'white' and *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] respectively, which is why they added the phrase 'preserve the black' after 'know the white' and 'know the honor' before 'preserve *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor].' They also went on to add the four phrases 'be a model unto the world, being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err, and you will return to the utmost of non-presence' in order to maintain the rhyme of the text which had been altered by adding the word 'black.' This makes it all the more obvious that we are dealing with an interpolation here. A first clear indication for this is the fact that those who interpolated this passage were unaware of the ancient use of *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] as the opposite of 'white', a use found from the Zhou period (770–255 BCE) to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). In the phrases 'be the brook of the world' and 'be the valley of the world', the words 'brook' and 'valley' similarly refer to places where water flows down to. The interpolated phrase 'be a model unto the world' does not match with 'brook' and 'valley' and was simply added for the sake of making the whole passage rhyme. This is a second clear indication. Since Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) already commented on the word 'model' as well as the other interpolated phrases, we can infer that this passage must have been inserted around the beginning of the Wei-Jin period (220–420). Fortunately, we can rely on the quotation in the *Zhuangzi* to reconstruct the original text, and consequently emend this

passage in order to preserve its true form." (*Du lao zhaji* 读老札记 [*Notes on Reading the Laozi*]).

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) notes: "Yi Shunding is right [...] In ancient texts, the characters *rong* 荣 [glory, honor] and *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] were loanwords for *chong* 宠 [to favor] and *ru* 辱 [to humiliate]. That the phrase 'favor (宠) and humiliation (*ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor]) appear frightening' in Chapter 13 uses the words *chong* 宠 [to favor] and *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] instead of *rong* 荣 [glory, honor] and *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] provides further proof for the fact that this passage was a later addition. However, in the chapter *Dao ying xun* 道应训 [*Instruction on Responding to the Dao*] from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] this chapter in the *Laozi* is already quoted as saying 'know the honor (荣), preserve the shame (辱), be the valley of the world', which indicates that the interpolation can be dated as early as the beginning of the Han dynasty." (*Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]).

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) comments: "Note: This passage originally read as follows: 'Know the male while preserving the female, be the brook of the world. By being the brook of the world, constant efficacy will not desert you, and you will return to infancy. Know the white, preserve the black (辱), be the valley of the world. By being the valley of the world, constant efficacy will be sufficient, and you will return to the state of uncarved wood.' The entire passage 'preserve the black, be a model unto the world. By being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err and you will return to the utmost of non-presence. Know the honor' (a total of 23 characters) is a later addition. I will put forward the six arguments to prove this: 1) The *Laozi* originally contrasted the male with the female and white with black (辱). *Ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] is an earlier version of the character *ru* 黀. In the *Yupian* 玉篇 [*Jade Chapters*] [1]t says: '*Ru* 黀 means the blackness of dirt.' In Chapter 41 of the *Laozi*, we read: 'The most white seems *ru* 辱 [dirty, insult]'. Here, *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor] is also used in contrast to whiteness, which proves that the original text of the *Laozi* definitely did not use the character *hei* 黑 [black] in contrast to 'white.' 2) Honor and shame (荣辱) are rendered as *chong ru* 宠辱 in the *Laozi*, as we can see in the sentence 'to be favored (honored) or shamed appear frightening' (宠辱若惊) from Chapter 13. This proves that the contrast between 'shame' and 'honor' was certainly not part of the original text of the *Laozi*. 3) In the phrases 'be the brook of the world' and 'be the valley of the world', the words 'brook' and 'valley' similarly refer to places where

1 Tr. note: a dictionary compiled by Gu Yewang 顾野王 (d. 581).

water flows down to. The interjected lines 'be a model unto the world' have nothing to do with this. 4) 'Returning to infancy' and 'returning to the state of uncarved wood' are similar in meaning. Infancy is the time when human nature has not yet dissipated. *Pu* 朴 [simple, plain, uncarved wood] refers to wood that has not yet been carved up. The interpolated phrase 'returning to the utmost of non-presence' is totally unrelated to these concepts. 5) In the chapter *Dao ying* [*xun*] 道应 [训] [*Instruction on Responding to the Dao*] from the *Huainanzi* the text of the *Laozi* is quoted as reading 'know the male while preserving the female, be the brook of the world' and 'know the honor, preserve the shame, be the valley of the world', but does not invoke the sentence 'know the white, preserve the black (黑), be a model unto the world.' That is because this sentence was not included in the version of the *Laozi* the *Huainanzi* based itself on. Moreover, the lines quotes as 'know the honor (荣), preserve the shame', originally should read 'know the white, preserve the black (辱).' The character *rong* 荣 in current editions [of the *Huainanzi*] is the result of an alternation some careless person made on the basis of a flawed edition of the *Laozi*. The passage from the *Huainanzi* reads as follows: 'King Wen 文 refined his virtue and put his government in order so that after three years, two-thirds of the whole world surrendered to him. When Zhou 纣 [the last emperor of the Shang-dynasty (1600–1046 BCE)] caught word of this he became greatly vexed [...] He held king Wen captive in Youli 羑里. [...] When king Wen returned home he [put on a show by] fashioning gates of jade and building a terrace for observing celestial movements, seeking out the company of young concubines, and sounding the drums and bells, as he bided his time waiting for Zhou to make a mistake. Zhou heard of king Wen's behavior and said: 'Count Chang 昌 of Zhou [king Wen] has changed his ways, I will worry no more.' Thus, Zhou [continued his brutalities,] making *paoluo* 炮烙 [burning pillar, an instrument of torture,], cutting babies from the wombs of their mothers, and slaughtering those who dared admonish him. And so king Wen succeeded in bringing his plan to completion [viz., rebellion against the brutal King Zhou]. That is why the *Laozi* says: 'Know the honor, preserve the *ru* 辱 [black], be the valley of the world." Note: 'Refining virtue and putting the government in order' has nothing to do with 'honor' (荣), but rather with the 'white', that is to say, with purity in conduct. 'Fashioning gates of jade and building a terrace for observing celestial movements, seeking out the company of young concubines, and sounding the drums and bells' has nothing to do with *ru* 辱 in the sense of shame, but rather with *ru* 黀 [the blackness of dirt], which refers to degenerate and vile conduct here.

That King Wen changed his ways is precisely what the *Laozi* calls 'knowing the white and preserving the black or vile (辱).' All of this being the case, it becomes clear why the original version of the *Huainanzi* should have *bai* 白 [instead of *rong* 荣]. The fact that the whole passage starting from 'preserve the black (黑)' was missing in the edition of the *Laozi* on which the *Huainanzi* based itself is our fifth indication that it was a later interpolation. 6) In the chapter *Tianxia* 天下 [*All under Heaven*] from the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] Lao Dan 老聃 is quoted as saying: 'Knowing the male while preserving the female, be the pathway of the world. Know the white, preserve the black (辱), be the valley of the world.' Although parts of the text are missing here, we can be certain that the passage starting from 'preserve the black (黑)' did not occur in the edition available to Zhuangzi 庄子 (d. 286 BCE). My comments are based on the remarks by Yin Shunding and Ma Xulun, while I also made some additions of my own." (*Laozi zhenggu* 老子正诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]).

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998) comments: "Note: Yi Shunding, Ma Xulun, and Gao Heng are absolutely cogent. Thanks to the discovery of the Boshu 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] version of the *Laozi*, we can tell that the interpolations happened not until the late Wei-Jin period (220–420), but before the beginning of the Han dynasty, because the *Mawangdui* versions had already been tampered. That being said, the phrase 'know the honor' does not yet appear in the *Mawangdui* versions, while the phrase 'know the white' appears twice in the text, which makes it abundantly clear that the interpolation dates from somewhere between the end of the Warring States (ca. 475–221 BCE) and the period of the Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han dynasties. [The repeating "know the white" in the *Mawangdui* versions] initiated the first interpolation of 27 characters.[2] During the transmission of the text, the character *hei* 黑 [black] was added as the antithesis of *bai* 白 [white], while *rong* 荣 [honor] was added as the antithesis of *ru* 辱 [now mistakenly interpreted into humiliation], so that the original text of this chapter became divided into three instead of two sections, and the fabrication of the passage 'preserve the black, be a model unto the world. By being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err. If constant efficacy does not err, you will return to the utmost of non-presence' was incorporate—all of these comprise the second stage in the interpolation. In the Han dynasties, more specifically during the period of the Eastern Han, the

2 Tr. note: 知其白，守其黑，为天下式。为天下式，恒德不贷（忒）。恒德不贷（忒），复归于无极。

newly added 27 characters were moved to the front of the text, in order to make the transition more smooth between the phrase 'return to the state of uncarved wood' and 'when uncarved wood is split, it is made into utensils'. This was the third stage in the interpolation.[3] Afterwards, it became the basis for the received edition which dates back to the Wei-Jin period. The only difference with these editions and the *Mawangdui* versions is that the interpolated section was reduced from 27 to 23 characters." (*Laozi jiaodu* 老子校读 [*Critical Reading of the Laozi*].) Corrected on the basis of the various remarks quoted in the above.

4) *Qi* 器 [utensil, instrument]: Things (物), refers to the ten thousand things. In a note to Chapter 29, Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) remarks: "*Qi* 器 means things."

5) It: Refers to *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, uncarved wood].

6) *Guanzhang* 官长 [commanding official]: The leader of all the officials of every rank. Refers to the ruler.

7) Great workmanship is done without any cutting (大制不割): Rendered as 大制无割 in the *Mawangdui* editions. It means that a perfect government does not separate things from each other.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) notes: "Without cutting means not drawing up boundaries between this and that."

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3 Tr. note: Zhang Songru would seem to discern the following three successive stages in the changes made to the original text of the *Laozi* (interpolations marked in bold type):

(1) First Stage, characterized by the addition of 27 characters that start from a repeating "know the white". 知其雄，守其雌，爲天下谿。爲天下谿，恒德不离，恒德不离，复归于婴儿。知其白，，守其辱，爲天下谷。爲天下谷，恒德乃足，恒德乃足，复归于朴。**知其白，守其黑，爲天下式。爲天下式，恒德不贷 [忒]。恒德不贷 [忒]，复归于无极。**朴散则爲器，圣人用之，则爲官长，故大制无割。[Note: The passage "知其白，守其黑，爲天下式。爲天下式，恒德不贷 [忒]。恒德不贷 [忒]，复归于无极" is already seen in *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*), which is referred to by Zhang as the first case of interpolation.]

(2) Second Stage, mainly characterized by the appearance of "*rong* 荣 [honor]" and the other changes: 知其雄，守其雌，爲天下谿。爲天下谿，常 [恒] 德不离。常 [恒] 德不离， 复归于婴儿。知其**荣，**守其辱，爲天下谷。爲天下谷，常 [恒] 德乃足。常 [恒] 德乃足，复归于朴。**知其白，守其黑，爲天下式。爲天下式，常 [恒] 德不贷 [忒]。常 [恒] 德不贷 [忒]，复归于无极。**朴散则爲器，圣人用之，则爲官长，故大制不 [无] 割。

(3) Third Stage, characterized by the texual relocation for the sake of coherence in using the notion of "*pu* 朴 [simple]"). 知其雄，守其雌，爲天下 g 。 爲天下谿，常德不离。[常德不离，] 复归于婴儿。知其白**，守其黑，爲天下式。爲天下式，常德不忒，常德不忒，复归于无极。知其荣，**守其辱，爲天下谷。爲天下谷，常德乃足，常德乃足，复归于**朴**。**朴**散则爲器，圣人用之，则爲官长，故大制不割。

Gao Heng remarks: "Great workmanship is in accordance with what is self-so, and thus, it is done without cutting. Everything simply cherishes its own simplicity."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) comments: "'Great workmanship' is similar to great governance (大治). Without cutting is similar to without governing (无治). By not governing, the world that emerged when simplicity was split asunder can return to a state of uncarved wood. This is precisely the great governance of the sages."

Contemporary Translation

Fully comprehend masculine strength while still finding peace in female gentleness, this is the pathway to be followed by the world. If this pathway is followed by the world, constant efficacy will not be lost, and you will return to a state of infancy.

Fully comprehend what is bright, while still finding peace in obscurity, this is [like] the river valley of the world. Only by being the river valley of the world will constant efficacy become abundant, and will you be led back to a state of genuine simplicity.

The Dao of genuine simplicity becomes dispersed into the ten thousand things, but someone who is aligned with the Dao can continue to use genuine simplicity to become the leader of all officials. That is why a perfect government does not introduce separations in between things.

Argument

"Know the male while preserving the female": When it comes to the opposition between the "male" and the "female," a person must come to a full understanding of the "male" aspect of things and then dwell within the "female" aspect. The word "preserving" in the expression "preserving the female" does not imply that one should cower back or withdraw [from the world], but implies a sense of self-sufficiency, as it means being able not only to retain the "female" side, but also to make positive use of the "male" side. Consequently, someone who "knowing the male while preserving the female" finds himself or herself in the most ideal position imaginable and has a complete understanding of the situation at hand. Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921) remarks: "Nowadays, those who turn to Laozi only know the second half of this phrase and are ignorant of the

fact that the essence of this saying is contained in the first half." Yan is absolutely right, because Laozi not only talks about "preserving the female", but also "knows the male." "Preserving the female" denotes remaining tranquil, retreating into the background, and retaining gentleness, but also at the same time means to gather inside, to gather together, and to preserve.

"Pathway" and "valley" symbolize abiding in a state devoid of struggle, of not contending. Laozi was acutely aware of the contention, greed, confusion, and unrest shown in the custom of the pollical culture and in society at large, which is why he advocated "modesty and tolerance," while also at the same time calling upon people to return to genuine simplicity.

Twenty-Nine

將欲取 (1) 天下而為 (2) 之，吾見其不得已 (3)。天下神器 (4)，不可為也，〔不可執也 (5)。〕為者敗之，執者失之。
故物或行或隨；或噓或吹 (6)；或強或羸；或培或墮 (7)。
是以聖人去甚，去奢，去泰 (8)。

If [one] desires to *qu* 取 [to take, obtain, please] the world and *wei* 为 [to do, act upon, administer] (2) it, I see that it cannot be done (不得已) (3). The world is a *shen* 神 [spiritual, divine, sacred] *qi* 器 [utensil, instrument] (4), it cannot be acted upon/administered, [it cannot be *zhi* 执 [to hold in the hand, cling, capture] (5).] Those who act will be defeated, those who cling will lose it.

And so some things lead the way while others follow after, some *xu* 噓 [to breathe out, hush] while others *chui* 吹 [to blow, puff] (6); some are strong while others are weak; some *pei* 培 [to bank up (with earth), foster, cultivate] while others *duo* 堕 [to fall, sink] (7).

This is why the sage does away with *shen* 甚 [very, extremely, excessive], does away with *she* 奢 [luxurious, extravagant], and does away with *tai* 泰 [extreme, extravagant, exaggerated] (8).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Qu* 取 [to take, obtain]: To act, to govern or regulate, means to control and transform.

   Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "In the third part of the section *Shi gu* 释诂 [*Explaining Old Words*] in the *Guangya* 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*] we read: '*Qu* 取 means to act (为).' In the *Guoyu* 国语 [*Discourses of the States*] we encounter the sentence: 'This illness cannot be *wei* 为 [to do, act upon, administer].' Wei [Zhao] 韦 [昭] (d. 273) explains: '*Wei* 为 [to do, act upon, administer] means *zhi* 治 [to cure, act upon] here.' This shows that *qu* 取 means *wei* 为 [to do, act upon, administer], and that the latter has the same sense as *zhi* 治 [to govern, regulate, cure]."

2) *Wei* 为 [to do, act on, administer]: Refers to purposeful action (有为), or doing something by brute force.

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3) It cannot be done (不得已): It cannot be obtained (得) [see Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112) commentary]. *Yi* 已 is an auxiliary particle [see Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (ca. 13th century) commentary].

Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) notes: "Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) interprets 'it cannot be done' into '[it] cannot win over the hearts of the people or embody the Dao of heaven'. This interpretation is exactly appropriate. This phrase has the same meaning as the modern expressions 'nothing is obtained' (无所得) or 'nothing is gained (无所获).' Someone renders this phrase as 'to have no alternative' (迫不得已), which errs profoundly here."

4) The world is a *shen* 神 [spiritual, divine, sacred] *qi* 器 [utensil, instrument]: The world is a sacred thing. "The world (天下)" refers to the people of the world.

Heshang Gong comments: "*Qi* 器 [utensil, instrument] means things, and human beings are the sacred things in the world. The sacred things enjoy tranquility and cannot be governed through purposeful action."

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) notes: "Sacred instruments means sacred things. It refers to what is most precious."

5) It cannot be *zhi* 执 [to hold in the hand, cling, capture]: This sentence is missing in the Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version, added on the basis of Liu Shipei's 刘师培 (d. 1919) remarks.

Liu Shipei comments: "Wang Bi's commentary reads: 'The ten thousand things take what is self-so as their nature. Therefore they should be complied with/followed, but cannot be acted upon, they can be comprehended, but cannot be clung (执) to. Things have a constant nature, but forcefully acting upon them cannot but lead to defeat. Things come and go, and clinging to them cannot but lead to loss.' If we look at Wang's annotations, then there should be the phrase 'cannot be clung to' that follows after 'cannot be acted upon' in the main text of this chapter. In the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*], the *Laozi* is quoted as saying: 'The greatest instruments (器) in the world cannot be clung to and cannot be acted upon. Those who act upon it will be defeated, those who cling to it will lose it.'" (*Laozi jiaobu* 老子斠补 [*Collations and Emendations to the Laozi*]).

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920) comments: "Note: There should be the phrase 'cannot be clung to' that follows after 'cannot be acted upon.' [I would like to] demonstrate this point with three proofs. Firstly, in the annotation of Gan Lingsheng's 干令生 (d. 336) *Jinji zonglun* 晋纪总论 [*General Treatise on the Annals of the Jin Dynasty*], which is contained in the anthology *Wenxuan* 文选 [*Selections of Literature*] [compiled by Xiao

Tong 萧统 (d. 531)], the *Wenzi* is quoted as saying that this passage in the *Laozi* reads: 'The greatest instrument (器) in the world cannot be clung to and cannot be acted upon. Those who act upon it will be defeated, those who cling to it will lose it.' Secondly, Wang Bi notes: 'Therefore they should be complied with/followed, but cannot be acted upon, they can be comprehended, but cannot be clung (执) to.' Since the phrase 'cannot be clung to' appears in Wang's commentary, we can be sure it must have been there in the main text of the *Laozi* as well. Thirdly, in Chapter 64 it says, 'Those who act fail, those who control lose, this is why the sages [practice] non-action (无为) and thus do not fail, they do not control things thus they do not lose.' 'Non-action' corresponds to 'cannot be acted upon (不可为)' and 'not clinging' corresponds with 'cannot be clung to' in this chapter. Since this phrase occurs in Chapter 64, it is reasonable to suppose it was included here as well. It is clear that the phrase 'those who cling will lose it' should be preceded by 'it cannot be clung to.'" (*Du Lao zhaji* 读老札记 [*Reading Notes on the Laozi*]).

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) notes: "Liu Shipei is right. Peng Si 彭耜 (ca. 13th century) quotes Huang Maocai 黄茂材 (ca. 12th century) as saying: 'The sacred instrument in the world cannot be acted upon, and cannot be clung to. As for the body of a human being, is this not a sacred instrument?' This makes it clear that this phrase was included in the edition available to Huang."

Liu Shipei and Yi Shunding's remarks are reliable. Accordingly, the phrase 'cannot be clung to' has been added after 'cannot be acted upon' on the basis of Wang Bi's annotation and the text of the *Wenzi*.

6) Some *xu* 嘘 [to breathe out, hush] while others *chui* 吹 [to blow, puff]: The Wang Bi version has *xu* 歔 [to sigh, snort] instead of *xu* 嘘 [to hush, breathe out softly], whereas in the Heshang Gong edition it says *xu* 呴 [to breathe, yawn]. The Jing Long 景龙 version and the fourth *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] edition all have *xu* 嘘 [to hush, breathe out softly].

Yi Shunding notes: "Note: *Xu* 歔 originally read *xu* 嘘. Given the contrast between 'strong' and 'weak' below in the text, there should also be an opposition between *xu* 嘘 [to hush, breathe out softly] and *chui* 吹 [to blow, puff] here. In the *Yupian* 玉篇 [*Jade Chapters*],[1] the *Shenglei* 声类 [*Classification of Sounds*][2] is quoted as saying 'breathing out forcibly is called *chui* 吹 [to blow, puff], breathing out softly is called *xu* 嘘 [to

1 Tr. note: A dictionary compiled by Gu Yewang 顾野王 (d. 581).

2 Tr. note: Oldest extant Chinese rhyme dictionary dating from around 230 CE.

hush, breathe out softly].' This is the difference between these two words, which corresponds to the original meaning of the *Laozi*."

7) Some *pei* 培 [to bank up (with earth), foster, cultivate] while others *duo* 堕 [to fall, sink]: This sentence reads "some are defeated while others are overthrown (或挫或隳)" in the Wang Bi version. The Heshang Gong version has "some are *zai* 载 [carry, and, also] while others are overthrown (或载或隳)". (Heshang Gong notes: '*Zai* 载 [carry, and, also] means to be at peace, *hui* 隳 [destroy, wreck] means to be in danger.') In the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) edition and the Fan Yingyuan edition we read "或培或堕" [some are banked up while others sink away] instead, which is also the case in the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions. Amended on the basis of the latter edition. Note: The phrase "and so some things lead the way while others follow after" should be understood in Gao Ming's sense in his *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛书老子校注 [*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi*].

Gao Ming comments: "In the Wang Bi edition the character *pei* 培 [to bank up (with earth), foster, cultivate] is mistakenly rendered as *cuo* 挫 [to be defeated] [...] In the *Mawangdui* versions, this last phrase of the section reads '或培或堕', as is also the case in the Fu Yi version and the Fan Yingyuan version. This was almost certainly how the original text of the *Laozi* went. If we carefully compare all of the ancient and modern editions of the text, we can surmise that the whole section ran as follows: 'And so some things lead the way while others follow, some hush while others puff; some are strong while others are weak; some are banked up while others sink away'." Wang Bi comments: "These oppositions between 'some' and 'others' all speak of the alternation between the movement of going against and going along which governs things, a movement which happens without being instigated, acted upon, clung to, or divided. The sage understands thoroughly the nature of what is self-so, he grants free passage to the inclinations (情) of the ten thousand things, which is why he is in accordance with them and does not act, he goes along with them without instigating anything. This means that human beings and affairs are endless in variety, each having their own nature and inclinations: some proceed onwards while others fall behind; some are relaxed in nature, while others are impatient; some are strong, while others are weak; some care for themselves, while others bring ruin upon themselves. All of this testifies to the fluctuations in human affairs. The sage goes along with them without instigating anything, he is in accordance with them and does not act, and leaves things to their natural course."

8) Does away with *shen* 甚 [very, extremely, excessive], does away with *she* 奢 [luxurious, extravagant], and does away with *tai* 泰 [extreme, extravagant, exaggerated]: *Tai* 泰 [extreme, extravagant, exaggerated] means "excessive."

Heshang Gong comments: "*Shen* 甚 [very, extremely, excessive] refers to having an insatiable desire for music [entertainment], *she* 奢 [luxurious, extravagant] refers to clothing, adornment, food, and drink, and *tai* 泰 [extreme, extravagant, exaggerated] refers to palaces, chambers, terraces, and pavilions."

Xue Hui 薛蕙 (d. 1541) notes: "Each thing has its own spontaneous nature, how could it be acted upon [i.e. interfered with] and consequently be harmed!

This is why the sage gets rid of what is extreme, extravagant, and excessive and only follows what is self-so. [...] In the biography of Huang Ba 黃霸 (d. 51 BCE) [in the] *Han shu* 汉书 [*Book of the Han*] it says: 'Regarding the way of governance/administration, it is simply to get rid of what is extreme and excessive.' This statement is probably based on the *Laozi*, but it has a different meaning. When something is excessive, one should do away with it, but when something is small and harmless, one can leave it just as it is, this is what was meant by the Han dynasty scholars. Things have their natural [states] and cannot be forced on [interfered with]. Everything has its appropriateness and one should not complicate it or overdo it, this is what Laozi originally meant."

Contemporary Translation

Those who want to govern the world, but do so through brute force, I think that they will not reach their goal. 'Everything-under-Heaven' is a sacred thing, it cannot [be gained] through brute force, it cannot be controlled. What is achieved through brute force will surely lead to defeat, what is controlled will surely be lost.

The inclinations and nature of the people in this world are not all the same, some proceed onwards while others fall behind; some are relaxed in nature, while others are impatient; some are strong and healthy, while others are frail and weak; some care for themselves, while others bring ruin upon themselves.

This is why the sage must get rid of extreme, extravagant, and excessive measures.

Argument

This chapter is Laozi's warning to those who govern through "purposeful action (有为)." If a state is governed through brute force or dominated through violence, the ruler will pave the way towards his or her own downfall and destruction. All things in the world have their own nature and human beings all have different characters. Those in power should tolerate the development of difference and particularity and should not try to force things. Otherwise, this will lead to a situation where everything is forced to fit the same standard. Consequently, the ideal form of politics should go along with what is self-so and adapt itself to the circumstances. All extreme measures, cruel policies, and extravagant actions should be abandoned and are not suitable for implementation.

Thirty

以道佐人主者，不以兵強天下。其事好還 (1)。師之所處，荊棘生焉。[大軍之後，必有凶年。] (2)
善有果 (3) 而已，不敢 (4) 以取強。果而勿矜，果而勿伐，果而勿驕，果而不得已，果而勿強。物壯 (5) 則老，是謂不道 (6)，不道早已 (7)。

When the Dao is used to assist the people's sovereign, one does not overpower (强) the world with armies. Such affairs are bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back] (1). Where troops are stationed, there thistles and thorns will grow. [After a great battle, years of famine will inevitably ensue.] (2)

One who is good has *guo* 果 [fruit, result] (3) but leaves it at that, [one] does not *gan* 敢 [to dare, presume] (4) to control and overpower. [One] is successful but shows reserve, [one] is successful but does not brag, [one] is successful but does not become arrogant, [one] is successful but it remains beyond one's control, [one] is successful but does not overpower.

When things *zhuang* 壮 [strong, robust, mature] (5) they will grow old, this is called what is not Dao (6), and what is not Dao will end early (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Such affairs are bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back]: Resorting to arms will inevitably lead to retribution. In the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version this phrase is rendered as "such affairs are good" (其事好) and occurs after "[one]is successful but does not overpower."

Li Xizhai 李息斋 (ca. 13th century) notes: "If you kill someone's father, they will kill your father. If you kill someone's older brother, they will kill your older brother. This is what is called 'bound to return.'" (*Daode zhenjing yijie* 道德真经义解 [*Interpretation of the Genuine Daodejing*]).

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) remarks: "If I harm someone else, that person will harm me. That is why the text says, 'such affairs are bound to return.'"

Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972) notes: "In [Lu Deming's 陆德明 (d. 630)] [*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 [*Textual Explanations of the Classics*] it says: '*Huan* 还 is pronounced *xuan* 旋.' 'Such affairs are bound to return'

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means that there are no winners in war, and that it will invite disaster upon oneself."

2) After a great battle, years of famine will inevitably ensue: These two phrases are missing in the *Guodian* and *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions, the Jing Long 景龙 version, the [*Daode zhenjing*] *Cijie* [道德真经] 次解 [*Sequential Commentary* (*on the Genuine Daodejing*)] edition, as well as in the fourth version of the anonymous Tang dynasty "Damaged Text (残卷)." In the *Guodian* version, the sentence "where troops are stationed, thistles and thorns grow" is also lacking.

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) notes: "[The absence of these two phrases] is corroborated by what we read in Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) commentary: 'This means that armies are terrible and ruinous things. There is nothing they bring relief to, but always something they bring harm to. They slaughter the people and destroy their fields. That is why the text says that thistles and thorns will grow where troops are stationed.' Here the sentence 'after a great battle, years of famine will inevitably ensue' is also missing. Cheng [Xuanying] 成 [玄英] (d. 669) does not comment on this passage either, which makes it clear that it was not included in the edition of the text available to him. The sentence must originally be the commentary for the preceding two phrases."

Lao Jian 劳健 (d. 1951) notes: "The biography of Yan Zhu 严助 (d. 122 BCE) in the *Han Shu* 汉书 [*Book of the Han*] quotes the following sentence from a memorial written by King Liu An 刘安 of Huainan (d. 122 BCE):[1] 'Your humble servant has heard that after a military campaign, there will inevitably be years of famine.' We also read: 'This is what the *Laozi* means when it says that where troops are stationed, there thistles and thorns will grow.' If we base ourselves on what is claimed here, it appears that the expression 'after a military campaign, there will inevitably be years of famine' was part of a different set of old sayings and was not derived from the *Laozi*. Furthermore,

Wang Bi's note to this passage reads: 'They slaughter the people and destroy their fields. That is why the text says that thistles and thorns will grow where troops are stationed.' Here too, no mention is made of this saying." The remarks quoted in the above are most accurate. The passage in question has been deleted on the basis of the *Guodian* and *Mawangdui* versions.

1 Tr. note: Compiler of the famous *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*].

3) *Guo* 果 [fruit, result]: Result. Different interpretations of this word are possible: Firstly, "bringing relief in times of trouble." As we read in Wang Bi's annotations: "*Guo* 果 [fruit, result] has the same sense as 'bringing relief (济).' What is meant here is that someone who excels at using military force will only employ the troops to provide aid when disaster strikes." Secondly, "to accomplish," an interpretation found in Sima Guang's 司马光 (d. 1086) remarks: "*Guo* 果 [fruit, result] means to accomplish (成). In general, when violence has been brought under control and chaos has been dispelled, when one has simply succeeded in bringing help where it was needed, nothing more needs to be done." Thirdly, "to achieve victory", as we read in Wang Anshi's 王安石 (d. 1086) comments: "*Guo* 果 [fruit, result] is an expression for 'achieving victory.'" Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) notes: "In the chapter *Shi gu* 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*] of the *Erya* 尔雅 [*Approaching Correctness*] we read: '*Guo* 果 [fruit, result] means being victorious.' *Guo er yi* 果而已 [victorious and then end] means 'to be victorious and leave it at that'."

4) *Gan* 敢 [to dare, presume]: In the Jinglong stele this character is missing. In Yu Yue's 俞樾 (d. 1907) opinion it is a redundancy.

   Yu Yue comments: "Note: The character *gan* 敢 [to dare, presume] is redundant. In his commentary, Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) says: 'He does not presume to take on the name of the mighty because of his success (不以果敢取强大之名).' The two characters *bu yi* 不以 [not … because of] are part of the text of the *Laozi* itself. The characters 果敢 are meant to provide further explanation to the word 'success (果)' in the previous sentence, but this does not imply that the character *guo* 果 was repeated in the main text of the *Laozi*. That the current edition of the text reads '不敢以取强' [does not presume to control or overpower because of] is expanded because of the Heshang Gong commentary.

   Wang Bi's note to this passage says: 'He does not control or overpower the world with military force', which also uses the words *bu* 不 and *yi* 以 [not … with] adjacently; this can further corroborate the fact that the character *gan* 敢 is redundant here. In the Jinglong stele from the Tang dynasty, the phrase in question is correctly rendered as 不以取强 [does not control and overpower because of] and the text should be amended on the basis of this version." Note: This matches with what we find in the *Mawangdui* versions, where this phrase is rendered as 毋以取强 [should not control or overpower because of].

5) *Zhuang* 壮 [strong, robust, mature]: An eruption of military force (Wang Bi's comment).

6) Not Dao (不道): Not conforming to the Dao.
In the Jing Long edition, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) edition, and many other ancient versions "not Dao" is rendered as "not the Dao (非道)."
7) What is not Dao will end early: "To end early" means to die prematurely.

Contemporary Translation

Someone who assists the ruler with the Dao does not have to rely on military force to show strength to the world. Resorting to arms inevitably leads to retribution. The places where troops arrive will be overgrown with thistles and thorns. [After a great war, there will inevitably be years of famine.]

Someone who is adept at using military force will only strive to attain the goal of providing relief in times of trouble, and nothing more. One does not use the armies to show off his or her power. Having attained this goal, but still retaining his or her reserve, having attained this goal, yet not bragging about it; having attained this goal, yet not becoming conceited; having attained this goal, but still remaining beyond what can be controlled; having attained this goal, yet not being overbearing.

All those who are full of energy and vigor will hasten towards their decline. This is because they are not in accordance with the Dao, and what is not in accordance with the Dao will soon vanish.

Argument

No human activity presents us with more ignorance and brutality than warfare. The extreme violence of war is truly terrifying for anyone who witnesses it: "Where troops are stationed, there thistles and thorns will grow." These two simple phrases offer an exhaustive description of the disastrous consequences of war.

War never ends well. The losing side will suffer enormous losses, their country will be destroyed and their homes lost. But the price the winning side has to pay for its victory is also enormous and the victors too will end up with nothing but a "mouth filled with ashes." This is why Laozi warns that "such an affair is bound to return." Those who wreak havoc with armed force will reap just what they sow. Those who violently rush ahead brandishing arms are inviting destruction upon themselves.

Thirty-One

夫兵者 (1)，不祥之器，物或惡之，故有道者不處 (2)。
君子居則貴左，用兵則貴右 (3)。兵者不祥之器，非君子之器，不得已而用之，恬淡 (4) 爲上。勝而不美，而美之者，是樂殺人。夫樂殺人者，則不可得志於天下矣。
吉事尚左，凶事尚右。偏將軍居左，上將軍居右。言以喪禮處之。殺人之衆，以悲哀 (5) 泣 (6) 之，戰勝以喪禮處之。

Now as for weapons (1), these are instruments (器) of misfortune, things dislike them indeed, that is why one who possesses the Dao does not involve himself with them (2).

The exemplary person (君子) values the left side when at home, but when one resorts to arms he values the right side (3). Weapons are instruments of misfortune, they are not the instruments of the exemplary person, who will use them only if there is no other way, [because] to be *tiandan* 恬淡 [tranquil, indifferent] (4) is the highest. Being victorious is not something pleasant, taking pleasure in it amounts to enjoying killing people. And one who enjoys killing people will not be able to fulfill one's ambitions in the world.

On auspicious occasions the left side is esteemed (尚), on mournful occasions the right side is esteemed. The lieutenant-general stays to the left, the supreme general stands to the right. This means that they handle it as if they were performing funeral rites. When entire multitudes are slaughtered, then with *beiʾai* 悲哀 [sorrowful, grieved] (5) they are *qi* 泣 [to weep] (6) for, and when a war has been won, it is dealt with in accordance with funeral rites.

Commentary and Explanation

1) Weapons (夫兵者): Current editions have "now as for fine (佳) weapons." The two *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions both read "now as for weapons." Amended on the basis of these versions.

D. C. Lau (Liu Dianjue) 刘殿爵 (d. 2010) comments: "'Fine weapons' does not match the meaning of the text, which is why Wang Niansun 王念孙 (d. 1832) has corrected *jia* 佳 [good] to *wei* 唯 on the basis of other relevant passages in the *Laozi*. However, the expression *fu wei* 夫唯 is used to link up a sentence with the foregoing context and should not

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appear at the beginning of a chapter, which raises the suspicion that the order of the sentences in this chapter was scrambled. The *Mawangdui* editions we now have at our disposal read: 'Weapons, these are instruments of misfortune (夫兵者，不祥之器也) (in the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] the character *ye* 也 [final particle in assertive nominal sentences] is missing), things dislike them indeed (物或恶之) (the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] has *ya* 亚 instead of *wu* 恶, the character *zhi* 之 is missing).' The word 'weapons' is preceded only by the character *fu* 夫 [topic marker]. This makes it clear that the problems with this sentence in current editions are caused by the introduction of a redundant character after *fu* 夫." (Quoted from *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu Laozi chutan* 马王堆汉墓帛书老子初探 [*A Tentative Inquiry into the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi found in the Han-dynasty Tomb at Mawangdui*], *Mingbao yuekan* 明报月刊, September 1982).

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) notes: "The Japanese commentator Nakai Sekitoku 中井积德 (d. 1817) remarks: 'I suspect the character *jia* 佳 [good] is redundant.' This matches with the *Mawangdui* editions." (*Mawangdui boshu Laozi shitan* 马王堆帛书老子试探 [*A Preliminary Investigation into the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi Excavated at Mawangdui*]).

2) Things dislike them indeed, that is why one who possesses the Dao does not involve himself with them: The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version has "[things] dislike them indeed, that is why someone who *yu* 欲 [to desire, want] them does not abide by it ([物] 或恶之，故有欲者弗居)" (similar to the text of Chapter 24). The character *yu* 欲 [to desire, want] here is a phonetic loanword for *yu* 裕 [abundant, tolerant, to instruct], so *yu zhe* 欲者 [one who desires] should read *yu zhe* 裕者 [one who is tolerant]. The word *yu* 裕 [abundant, tolerant, to instruct] not only has the same meaning as *dao* 道, their ancient pronunciation was also the same. (See Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018), *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛书老子校注 [*Critical and Annotated Edition of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi*].

3) The exemplary person (君子) values the left side when at home, when he resorts to arms he values the right side: In ancient times people believed that the left side was *yang* and the right side was *yin*, with *yang* standing for what engenders and *yin* standing for what kills. When the text goes on to mention "valuing the left side", "valuing the right side", "esteeming the left side", "esteeming the right side", "staying to the left" and "standing to the right", all of this refers to ancient ritual protocol.

4) *Tiandan* 恬淡 [tranquil, indifferent]: The Guodian edition has 銛 X [archaic character: left side = radical si 糸 , right side = 龙 above + 廾

below], which is pronounced the same as *tiandan* 恬淡 [tranquil, indifferent]. (See Peng Hao 彭浩 (b. 1944), *Guodian Chujian Laozi jiaodu* 郭店楚简老子校读 [*Collation and Reading of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]).

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) notes: "*Tian* 恬 means not to delight in, *dan* 淡 means diluted or bland. Refers to what a person does not enjoy."

5) *Bei'ai* 悲哀 [sorrowful, grieved]: The received Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) edition has *aibei* 哀悲. Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version, as well as many other ancient editions all read *bei'ai* 悲哀.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) remarks: "The word *aibei* 哀悲 should be changed to *bei'ai* 悲哀 on the basis of the Wang Bi edition found in the *Dao zang* 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*]."

6) *Qi* 泣 [to weep]: Two interpretations of this word are possible. Firstly, "to weep", which is the usual and literal interpretation. Secondly, *qi* 泣 [to weep] could be a miswriting of *li* 莅 [attend, be present]. The characters *li* 莅 [attend, be present], *li* 莅 [reach, arrive, attend], and *li* 涖 [attend] are all the same and mean "to arrive" or "to treat as." Luo Yunxian 罗运贤 (d. 1969) notes: "*Qi* 泣 [to weep] must be a miswriting of *li* 莅 [attend, be present]. The character *li* 莅 [attend, be present] does not occur in the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*], that is because it was written as *li* 隶 there." (*Laozi yuyi* 老子余义 [*Supplementary Meanings of the Laozi*], quoted in Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972), *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校释 [*Explanations of the Laozi*]). Note: In the *Mawangdui* versions we read *li* 立 [stand, establish] which is probably shorthand for *li* 莅 [reach, arrive, attend]. In my modern translation, I have followed the second interpretation.

Contemporary Translation

Weapons are ominous things, they are abhorred by everyone. Therefore a person who embodies the Dao does not employ them.

The exemplary person usually values the left side, but when one resorts to arms, one values the right side. Weapons are ominous things, they are not used by the exemplary person. One will only use them if it is absolutely necessary, but ideally one treats them with indifference. When one is victorious, this does not fill him or her with joy. If one would be filled with joy, this would mean one delights in killing people. Someone who delights in killing people will not be able to succeed in the world.

On happy occasions, the left side is valued most, on mournful occasions the right side is valued most. An assistant general stays to the left, the supreme commander stands to the right, this indicates that dispatching troops to go into battle is handled in the same way as performing a funeral ceremony. When multitudes have been killed, this is treated with an attitude of profound grief. When a battle has been won, it should be handled in the same way as a funeral ceremony.

Argument

"Warfare is something which brings about terrible disaster." Laozi points out the damage done by war and expresses his pacifist convictions.

Resorting to arms is done when there is no other alternative, and when military means are employed to put an end to violence and bring relief to the people, it is still preferable for "indifference to be the highest." "When one is victorious, this does not fill him or her with joy. If one would be filled with joy, this would mean one delights in killing people": these sentences truly make short work of a bellicose mentality and belligerent behavior which values the use of military force. Laozi adds that when war has become unavoidable, it should still "be handled as if one were performing funerary rites, when entire multitudes are slaughtered, it should be treated with profound grief." Here, the voice of humanism resounds.

This chapter counts as a frontal attack on the military aggression of Laozi's time.

Thirty-Two

道常無名、朴 (1)。雖小 (2)，天下莫能臣 (3)。侯王若能守之，萬物將自賓 (4)。天地相合，以降甘露，民莫之令而自均 (5)。
始制有名 (6)，名亦既有，夫亦將知止 (7)，知止所以不殆。
譬道之在天下，猶川谷之於江海 (8)。

The Dao is constantly nameless, *pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] (1). Although [it is] *xiao* 小 [small, few, young] (2), no one in the human realm can [make it] subordinate (3). [If] dukes and kings can hold on to it, the ten thousand things will *bin* 宾 [guest, to comply] of their own accord (4). Heaven and earth [will] interact to drop sweet dew. The people cannot order it and it will self-balance (5).

[As] *zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, carve] begins, there are names (6). [As] there are names, there will also be the knowledge of [when and where to] *zhi* 止 [stop, only, until] (7). The knowledge of [when and where to] stop is that by which [one] is not in danger. Compared, the Dao is to the human realm as stream valleys are to rivers and oceans (8).

Commentary and Explication

1) The Dao is constantly nameless, *pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple]: Nameless is Laozi's analogy for the Dao, just like in Chapter 41: "The Dao is hidden without a name." *Pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] is an instance of namelessness. *Pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] is timber not yet carved to make utensils (according to Deqing's 释德清 (d. 1623)).[1]

Two parsings of the opening fragment have been proposed: (1) the Dao is constantly nameless, *pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] (道常无名朴); and (2) the Dao is constantly nameless; though the *pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] is *xiao* 小 [small, few, young] (道常无名，朴虽小). The second parsing moves the term *pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] to the next sentence. Since Chapter 37 has the phrase "the nameless simple (朴)," the current reading groups nameless and *pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] together.

1 Tr. note: *Pu* 朴 [unprocessed timber, plain, simple] is often translated as "uncarved block."

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2) *Xiao* 小 [small, few, young]: Since the Dao is hidden and cannot be seen (道隐无名), it is described as small.

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "Because the Dao is constantly nameless, one cannot speak of it as small (小) or big. As the sage sees that it is so great that there is nothing it does not contain, they are forced to call it great; then again, it is so thin that there is no place that it does not enter into, hence [they] call it small (小)."

Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979): "The term *xiao* 小 [small, few, young] refers to the nameless uncarved block (朴), that is, the Dao body (道体). The Dao body is extremely fine (至精) and formless, hence it can be said to be small. However, *xiao* 小 [small, few, young] is not small in the usual sense of the term since, looking from another angle, this *xiao* 小 [small, few, young] can be said to be great (大). Chapter 34 says: 'constantly without desires (5),] [it] can be named small (小); all things return to it but without it being their ruler and owner, [it] can be named great.' All this is a description of the Dao body. The *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] notes that 'its greatness has no outside' (the aspect of greatness) and that 'its smallness has no inside' (the aspect of smallness)."

Note: Instead of the received text's *sui xiao* 虽小 [although (it is) small …], the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version has *wei qi* 唯妻 [only *qi* 妻]. *Qi* 妻 means thin, minute.[2]

3) No one […] can [make it] subordinate: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version has the particle *ye* 也 after *chen* 臣; the particle is absent in Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version and many Tang and Song versions, as it is in the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* and the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions of the *Laozi*. Hence its deletion here.

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "The particle *ye* 也 [too, also, final particle] is superfluous, as can be seen from the fact that *chen* 臣 [minister, official, subordinate] and *bin* 宾 [guest, to comply] used to rhyme." Gao's comment can be relied upon.

4) *Bin* 宾 [guest, to comply] of their own accord: To obey the Dao.

5) The people cannot order it and it will self-balance: Regarding the Dao's capacity to generate and nourish the ten thousand things, Chapter 51 says: "as [they] command nothing and always are self-so." At issue here is the Dao's capacity to produce and transform the ten thousand things spontaneously, absent any orders issued by man. There is no need for orders, that is, since the Dao's nourishment is spontaneous and indiscriminate, like that of morning dew.

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2 Tr. note: This is an extremely rare meaning of *qi* 妻.

6) [As] *zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, carve] begins, there are names: As the ten thousand things arise, all sorts of names are thereby produced. *Shi* 始 [beginning, to begin] refers to the beginning of the ten thousand things. *Zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, carve] is *zuo* 作 [initiate, arise] (according to by Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271)). "[As] the carving begins, there are names" is the same as "When *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, uncarved wood] is split, it is made into *qi* 器 [utensil, instrument]" in Chapter 28.

Wang Bi comments: "[As] the carving begins, officials and elders cannot not establish social statuses and their accordant duties in order to determine the superior and the inferior (尊卑), hence '[as] the carving begins, there are names.'"

Fu Shan 傅山 (d. 1684): "The *zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, carve] in '[as] *zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, carve] begins, there are names' should be read as *zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, carve] in *zhidu* 制度 [regime, system, institutions, establish standards], referring to the initial establishment of laws and institutions by the one ordering the human realm, [Fu Shan goes on to discuss how the names ultimately come from the nameless uncarved, and also opposite to the nameless uncarved. Therefore, names are contingent and not absolute] … now the later generations who possess the high and noble (崇高) positions think that as long as the names have already been established, their nobility will exist forever. However, the human realm is never one person's realm, it is the realm of the entire world" ("*Du Laozi* 读老子 [*Reading the Laozi*]," in *Shuanghong kan ji* 霜红龛集 [*Collection from the Frosty Red Houselet*]).

7) The knowledge of [when and where to] *zhi* 止 [stop, only, until]: Knowing the limits of human conduct. *Zhi* 止 [stop, only, until] means never overdoing something, namely, to conduct according to certain limit. Alternatively, *zhi* 止 [stop, only, until] can be understood as behaviour and manner (行止),[3] it refers to one's conduct and interaction in society.

8) Compared, the Dao is to the human realm as stream valleys are to rivers and oceans: According to Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974), "The character order in this sentence has been reversed; the correct text should read '(the relation of) the Dao to the human realm is comparable to (the relation) of stream valleys to rivers and seas (道之在天下，譬猶川谷之與江海). The amended text compares the Dao to rivers and seas, and the human realm and the ten thousand things, to stream valleys."

3 Tr. note: 行止 is short for 行为举止.

Contemporary Translation

The Dao is perpetually nameless and plain and simple. Although subtle and imperceptible, no one in the human realm can subordinate it. If dukes and kings can hold on to it, the ten thousand things will spontaneously obey.

As there is mutual merging (of *yin qi* and *yang qi*) between heaven and earth, sweet dew descends moistening all equally, absent any human incitement.

As the ten thousand things arise, all sorts of names are produced; once those names have been determined, one knows that there are limits, and by knowing one is limited, one can avoid danger.

The Dao's existence in the human realm is akin to rivers and oceans into which smaller streams flow.

Argument

Laozi uses the figure of an uncarved timber block to describe the Dao's primordial state of namelessness. If dukes and kings can hold on to the nameless, uncarved Dao (that is, if they can hold on to its characteristic of being spontaneous and non-active [自然无为的], then the people will be at ease, and each person will successfully fulfil their own life.

The function of the Dao is evenly distributed and ubiquitous; "The people cannot order it and it will self-balance." Contained in this is a spirit of equality.

This primordial, uncarved Dao descends facilitating the arising of the ten thousand things, whereby all sorts of names are also produced: social statuses and their accordant duties are determined, and offices and professional capacities are set up, providing appropriate norms to human conduct and social interaction.

Thirty-Three

知人者智，自知者明。
勝人者有力，自勝者強 (1)。
知足者富。
強行 (2) 者有志。
不失其所者久。
死而不亡者 (3) 壽。

One who knows others is wise, one who knows themselves is insightful.
One who overcomes others has power, one who overcomes themselves is *qiang* 强 [strong, force] (1).
One who knows what is enough is rich.
One who *qiang* 强 [strong, force] *xing* 行 [do, walk] (2) has [lasting] will.
One who does not lose their position is enduring.
One who dies but is not dead (3) has longevity.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Qiang* 强 [strong, force]: Has connotations of firmness and resoluteness. It is related to the character "*qiang* 强 [strong, force]" in the line "To hold on to the soft is called *qiang* 强 [strong, force]" in Chapter 52. Both are cases where Laozi uses the character in a specific way. The usage here and in Chapter 52 differs from the way "*qiang* 强 [strong, force]" is used on Chapter 72, where Laozi writes "the firm and strong (强) are *tu* 徒 [follower, type] of death."

2) *Qiang* 强 [strong, force] *xing* 行 [do, walk]: Means diligence here.

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "I suspect the word '*qiang* 强 [strong, force]' might be misplaced here."

Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 226) commentary records 'those who act with diligence and ability will surely achieve what they will for.' Chapter 41 reads, 'Higher people hear the Dao, diligence (勤) and walk (行) it.' Wang Bi's commentary records, 'One has the will [to do it].' The *Da zhong shi* 大宗师 [*Great Honored Teacher*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] records, "and genuine persons take it as 'action with

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serious effort (勤行)'."[1] Here it is *qin* 勤 [diligent, hard-working] that is used, as *qin* 勤 and *qiang* 强 [strong, powerful] had close pronunciations. In addition, it might be affected by the previous sentence, 'one who overcomes themselves is *qiang* 强 [strong, force]' [in which *qiang* 强 is used], and this is an error. I suspect that '*qiang* 强 [strong, force]' and '*qin* 勤 [diligent, hard-working]' might be interchangeable in ancient texts.

Chen Jingyuan 陈景元 (d. 1094) writes, 'Those who are "*qiang* 强 [strong, force] *xing* 行 [do, walk]" can be called "*qin* 勤 [diligent, hard-working] in action."' Yan's points may serve as a reference.

3) One who dies but is not dead: One's body is dead but their way remains (See Wang Bi's commentary).

Contemporary Translation

Knowing others is "wisdom," knowing oneself is what actually counts as "insightful."

Defeating others means having power, overcoming oneself is what actually counts as formidable strength.

Knowing satisfaction is what it means to be rich.

Unrelenting effort is what it means to have lasting will.

Not losing one's root is what it means to be enduring.

The body dying and yet enduring is what longevity actually is.

Argument

This chapter is about the individual's cultivation and establishing oneself. A person who can "know themselves," "overcome themselves," "be satisfied with themselves," and "work hard and diligently" should carefully examine themself, strengthen themself, discipline themself, and make determinate efforts. Only by doing so can one increase the development of their spiritual life and intellectual life. According to Laozi, knowing others and overcoming them are certainly important, but knowing oneself and overcoming oneself has priority.

1 Tr. note: There are other versions of this sentence from the *Zhuangzi*, "而真人以为 '勤行' 也" which read instead "而人真以为 '勤行' 也". However, this has very little impact on Chen Guying's point, as his argument does not focus on the difference between "genuine persons" or "persons genuinely are".

Thirty-Four

大道氾兮，其可左右。萬物恃之以 (1) 生而不辭 (2)，功成而不有 (3)。衣養 (4) 萬物而不為主，[常無欲 (5)，] 可名於小 (6)；萬物歸焉而不為主，可名為大。以其終不自為大，故能成其大。

The great Dao flows unboundedly, and it can be left and right. All things rely on it *yi* 以 [so as to, in order to] (1) generate, and it [the great Dao] does not *ci* 辞 [speak, decline] (2), and achieves without possessing (成果而不有) (3). [It] *yi* 衣 [clothe, cover] *yang* 养 [nourish, cultivate] (4) all things without being their ruler and owner, [constantly without desires (5),] [it] can be named small; all things return to it but without it being their ruler and owner, [it] can be named great. As throughout it does not take itself as great, it thereby can achieve its greatness.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Yi* 以 [so as to, in order to]: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version has "*er* 而 [and, however]" here instead of "*yi* 以 [so as to, in order to]." However, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Jinglong era stele version, Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112) version, Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version, and various other ancient versions all use "*er* 而 [and, however]" instead of "*yi* 以 [so as to, in order to]," so it is changed here accordingly.
2) *Ci* 辞 [speak, decline]: It has several interpretations. Firstly, to address or to speak; secondly, to decline or to refuse.
3) Achieve without possessing (成功而不有): Wang Bi's version has this line as "achieve without claiming possession [of the achieved] (成功不名有)." The word "to claim (名)" is a superfluous derivative here.

   Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920): "Commentary in *Bian ming lun* 辨命论 [*Essay on Predestination*] quotes, 'Achieve without having, love and cultivate all things without being their ruler and owner.' In its following commentary there are more quotations from Wang's commentary of the *Laozi*. This undoubtedly demonstrates that its reference is Wang's version. Thus, the line "achieve without claiming possession/ownership [of the achieved]" in the extant/current/present version of Wang Bi should have been "achieve without possessing/owing" and the word "to claim (名)" is a superfluous derivative here.

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Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "Note: The words 'without possessing (不有)' appear in Chapter 2, Chapter 10, and Chapter 51. Thus we know that these two words constitute a common phrase in the *Laozi*. 'Achieve without claiming possession [of the achieved]' should have been 'achieve without possessing,' Yi Shunding's argument is sound. According to Yi Shunding's argument I delete the word "claiming/reputation (名)" and leave the line as "achieve without possessing."

4) *Yi* 衣 [clothe, cover] *yang* 养 [nourish, cultivate]: Fu Yi's version has "*Yi* 衣 [clothe, cover] *pi*/*bei* 被 [wear, cover]."[1] Fan Yingyuan writes, "'*Yi* 衣 [clothe, cover] *pi* 被 [wear, be close]' means to cover (覆盖)." "*Yi* 衣 [clothe, cover] *yang* 养 [nourish, cultivate]" is related to the line "nurtures them and shields (覆) them" in Chapter 51. "*Yi* 衣 [clothe, cover]" and "*fu* 覆 [protect, cover]" both mean to shield and sustain (护持). "*Yi* 衣 [clothe, cover] *yang* 养 [nourish, cultivate] all things" is the same as "Shield/Protect (护) and nourish (养) all things."

5) Constantly without desires: These three characters are missing in Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) version, Li Rong's 李荣 (d. 683) version, and the *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] (No. *Ding* 丁).[2] If these three characters are omitted, then the adjacent sentences are parallel and symmetric.[3] However, the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] versions both have "forever without desire."

6) [It] can be named small: Wang Bi comments, "All things are generated through 'Dao', and are generated without knowing where they come from [...]. All things get their respective positions, as though 'Dao' did not do anything, thereby it can be named small."[4]

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1 Tr. note: In this context *yi pi* 衣被 is interpreted as a metaphor for "taking care of" and "showing favor."

2 Tr. note: No. Four. Ding 丁 is the fourth number in the Chinese classical system of ordinals named *Tiangan* 天干 [The Ten Celestial Stems]. So are *Jia* 甲 [No. One] and *Yi* 乙 [No. Two] mentioned in a following sentence concerning the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions of the *Laozi*.

3 Tr. note: A very common rhetorical feature of ancient Chinese texts.

4 Tr. note: In this case, *xiao* 小 particularly means unimportant, trivial or non-significant, as opposite to great or significant.

Contemporary Translation

The great Dao is flowing expansively, without any place where it cannot reach. All things rely on it in order to be generated and are not refused by it (the great Dao), and it achieves [this] without regarding this as its own feat/accomplishment. Nourishing all things without taking itself as the ruler, it therefore can be called "small." All things return and submit to it but it does not take itself as the master, thus, it can be called "great." Because it does not deem itself as great, hence, it is able to be great.

Argument

This chapter describes the Dao's function. Dao generates all things, nourishes all things, and makes all things receive what they need, and fit their natures, but without being domineering at all. Here Dao is used to expound on the spirit of going by what is natural and not being domineering. This is remarkably different from the style of Christianity's Jehovah, who after creating all things develops and dominates them, and regards them as his private properties. The spirit of "not declining or dismissing (不辞)," "not possessing or owning (不有)," and "not being domineering (不为主)" developed by the *Laozi* dispels the desire for possession and domination of the leader. Moreover, from the idea of "protecting and nourishing all things (衣养万物)" we can breathe in the air of love and warmth.

Thirty-Five

執大象 (1)，天下往。往而不害，安平太 (2)。
樂與餌　(3)，過客止。道之出口，淡乎其無味，視之不足見，聽之不足聞，用之不足既 (4)。

Grasping the *da xiang* 大象 [great sign] (1), and heading toward the world. Heading toward with no harm, *an* 安 [peaceful, whence] *ping* 平 [peaceful, equal] *tai* 太 [great, peaceful] (2).

Le 乐 [music, happiness] and *er* 饵 [food] (3), those who go by stop. When the Dao is out of mouth, so bland that it has no flavor, look at it and there is not enough to see, listen for it and there is not enough to hear, use it and it is never exhausted.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Da xiang* 大象 (great sign): Means great Dao.

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown): "'Sign' means Dao."

Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (d. 669): "The great sign is the symbol of the great Dao."

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "The great sign is the sign of no sign."

2) *An* 安 [peaceful, whence] *ping* 平 [peaceful, equal] *tai* 太 [great, peaceful]: "*An* 安 [peaceful, whence]" means "thus" or "so." In Wang Yinzhi's 王引之 (d. 1834) *Jing chuan shi ci* 经传释词 [*Interpretation of Words in Ancient Classics*], he writes "*An* 安 [peaceful, whence] means 'so,' 'thus,' or 'thereby.'" *Tai* 太 [great, peaceful] is the same as *tai* 泰, or peaceful and tranquil. Many ancient versions use *tai* 泰 [peaceful, tranquil] here instead. For example, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the *Shiwen* 释文 [*Explanations of the Classics*], the *Cijie* 次解 [道德真经次解 (*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*)], Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112) version, Lin Xiyi's version, and many other ancient versions all have this *tai* 太 [great, peaceful] written as *tai* 泰 [peaceful, tranquil].

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) writes: 'Peaceful, tranquil, placid, and harmonious are synonymous with *tai* 泰 [peaceful, tranquil], and all express the meaning of harmlessness. Taking '*an* 安 [peaceful, whence]' as peaceful or tranquil

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here is not correct. Yan Fu 严复 (d. 1921) writes: '*An* 安 [peaceful, whence] means free; *ping* 平 [peaceful, equal] means equal; *tai* 太 [great, peaceful] means getting on well with others.' Contemporary scholars [like Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) and Yan Fu] often force new concepts on the *Laozi*; this is wrong."

3) *Le* 乐 [music, happiness] and *er* 饵 [food]: Means music and good food.

4) Use it and it is never exhausted: The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions as well as Heshang Gong's version, have this line as "use it, it cannot be exhausted (用之不可既)."

Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 (1935–): "The sentence from the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] differs significantly from other versions (including the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* version) here. It does not start with the words 'use it (用之)' [some of the extant versions do not have the word 'it (之)'], but instead [begins] with '*er* 而 [and, thereby]'. This may be more in line with the original *Laozi*. 'It cannot be exhausted (不可既)' indicates that Dao's *neiyun* 内蕴 [intrinsic content] cannot be exhausted." (*Guodian laozi chu tan* 郭店老子初探 [*Initial Investigation of the Guodian Laozi*].)

Contemporary Translation

Carry out and obey the great Dao, all people in the world will come to submit themselves. All come together without harming one another, so everyone is harmonious and peaceful.

Music and delicacy can make a passerby stop in their tracks. However, the expression of the Dao is too bland to have any flavor, look at it and it cannot be seen, listen for it and it cannot be heard, use it and it will never be exhausted.

Argument

The governance via *ren* 仁 [humaneness], *yi* 义 [righteousness], *li* 礼 [ritual], and *fa* 法 [law] is like "music and delicacy," which is not comparable with following the self-so (自然) and non-assertive (无为) great "Dao"—although it has no form and no trace, it is nevertheless able to allow people to live peacefully.

Thirty-Six

將欲歙 (1) 之 (2)，必固 (3) 張之；將欲弱之，必固強之；將欲廢之，必固舉之 (4)；將欲取之，必固與之 (5)。是謂微明 (6)。
柔弱勝剛強。魚不可脫於淵，國之利器不可以示人 (7)。

If [one] wants to *xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate] (1) *zhi* 之 [it, that] (2), must *gu* 固 [solid, abide by, necessarily] (3) extend it; if [one] wants to weaken it, must strengthen it; if [one] wants to *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] it, must *ju* 举 [raise, promote] it (4); if [one] wants to *qu* 取 [take, gain] it, must first *yu* 与 [give, provide] it (5). This is called *wei* 微 [minute, subtle] *ming* 明 [bright, obvious, revealing] (6).

The soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong. Fish cannot leave the depths [of a deep pool],[1] the sharp instruments (利器) of a state cannot be shown to people (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate]: Means to gather, or to unite. The *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version has it as "*shi* 拾 [collect, gather]."

   The *Yu lao* 喻老 [*Illustration of the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] quotes the *Laozi* with the word "*xi* 翕 [gather, unite]" here. In ancient texts "*xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate]" and "*xi* 翕 [gather, unite]" are interchangeable.

2) *Zhi* 之 [it, that]: Here it means "*zhe* 者 [this, a person]" (see Chen Yidian's 陈懿典 (d. 1638) *Laozi daodejing jingjie* 老子道德经精解 [*Expounding the Daodejing of Laozi*]).

3) *Gu* 固 [solid, abide by, necessarily]: Means "necessarily" or "surely" (see Xu Zhijun's 徐志钧 (b. 1942) *Laozi boshu jiaozhu* 老子帛书校注 [*Commentary and Annotations to the Mawangdui Laozi*]).

4) If [one] wants to *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] it, it must be *ju* 举 [raise, promote]: In the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions, "*qu* 去 [get rid of, leave]" is used instead of "*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]." In the received text "*ju* 举 [raise, promote]" is substituted by "*xing* 兴

1 Tr. note: *Yuan* 渊 originally meant "depths of a deep pool." This is the meaning likely implied here.

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[rise up, excite]," and in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions it is "*yu* 与 [with, give]." In ancient Chinese "*yu* 与 [give]" and "*ju* 举 [raise, promote]" are interchangeable, and *ju* 举 is adapted in this text according to the theories of Lao Jian 劳健 (d. 1951), Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986), and others.

Lao Jian: "The character '*xing* 兴 [rise up, excite]' should be '*ju* 举 [raise, promote]' in the phrase 'must *xing* 兴 [rise up, excite] it' which would then rhyme with the next phrase 'must *yu* 与 [give] it.,' In ancient Chinese '*yu* 与 [give]' and '*ju* 举 [raise, promote]' are interchangeable. For example the Chapter '*Li yun* 礼运 [*The Conveyance of Rites*]' of the *Li ji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*] records it is written 'Selecting the talented and *yu* 与 [give, provide] the capable,' and according to the Chapter '*Zhuyan* 主言 [*The Words from a True Rulership*]' of the *Da dai li ji* 大戴礼记 [*Book of Rites Compiled by Dai the Elder*], it is written 'Selecting the talented and *ju* 举 [raise, promoting] the capable.' I speculate this character (*ju* 举) is also written as *yu* 与, as later generations did not know that '*yu* 与 [give]' and '*ju* 举 [raise, promote]' were interchangeable, and also overlooked the pattern of wording and rhyme in the *Laozi*; they then subjectively made the change [of 举 into 兴] in consideration of the character '*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]' [in previous phrase, so an antithesis between *xing* 兴 [rise up, excite] and *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] is neatly established]. This is why many versions passed down all use the word '*xing* 兴 [rise up, excite].'"

Gao Heng: "'*Yu* 与 [with, give]' should be '*ju* 举 [raise, promote],' they were mistakenly replaced with one another due to the similarity of their forms [與, 舉]. In ancient texts '*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]' is often contrasted with '*ju* 举 [raise, promote].'"

Feng Dafu 冯达甫 (d. 1997): "'*Xing* 兴 [rise up, excite]' is mistaken for '*yu* 与 [with, give]', as the forms of the two characters look similar [in traditional Chinese]. '*Yu* 与 [with, give]' and '*ju* 举 [raise, promote]' are interchangeable, the theories of Lao and Gao are indeed cogent; luckily the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* preserve such authentic cases." My comment: the views of Lao Jian and others are appropriate, so I adopt the character "*ju* 举 [raise, promote]" in the current version.

5) If [one] wants to *qu* 取 [take, gain] something, it must first be *yu* 与 [with, give]: In the received versions of the *Laozi* instead of "*qu* 取 [take, gain]" we have the character "*duo* 夺 [seize, win]." The *Yu lao* 喻老 [*Illustration of the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*], Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version, and Peng

Si's 彭耜 (d. 1229) version have "*qu* 取 [take, gain]" here. Based on this evidence I adopt "*qu* 取 [take, gain]" in my version.

Fan Yingyuan: "Taking '*duo* 夺 [seize, win]' as '*qu* 取 [take, gain]' is not compatible with the ancient usage."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "The *Guan yan lie zhuan* 管晏列传 [*Biographies of Guan Zhong* 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) and Yan Ying 晏婴 (d. 500 BCE)] chapter of the *Shi ji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] records: 'Therefore, it says that understanding that providing is gain, is the treasure of governance." The *Suo yin* 索隐 [*Exploring the Obscurity* (*of the Records of the Grand Historian*)] comments: 'The *Laozi* says: If [one] wants to *qu* 取 [take, gain] it, must first *yu* 与 [with, give] it.' Judging from the phrasing of the *Shi ji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] "therefore, it says that", I speculate the phrase 'providing is gain' originates from the *Laozi* 'If [one] wants to *qu* 取 [take, gain] it, one must first *yu* 与 [give, provide] it'. Both the *Shi ji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] and the *Suo yin* 索隐 [*Exploring the Obscurity* (*of the Records of the Grand Historian*)] use '*qu* 取 [take, gain, gain].' *Laozi zhengyi* 老子证义 [*Evidenced Interpretation of the Laozi*] also supports that '*qu* 取 [take, gain]' is the correct word. I suggest to adopt *qu* 取 [take, gain, gain] in accordance with the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*].

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992): "In brief, these few sentences are to explain the principle of facilitating the transformation of things."

Lu Yusan 卢育三 (1926–): "This section demonstrates that the *Laozi* recognizes transformation into the antithesis within the relationship between *xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate] and extention, weakness and strength, *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] and *ju* 举 [raise, promote], as well as *qu* 取 [take, gain] and *yu* 与 [with, give]. However, the attitude towards transformation varies according to different people and different affairs. With regard to oneself, one wants to prevent the development of things into the extreme which then initiates the transformation into their antitheses. Holding onto the empty, weak, disgraceful, feminine, and the like are methods for preventing things and affairs from becoming their opposites. The discussion here is about how to facilitate the development of things into the extreme which initiates the transformation into their antitheses." (*Laozi shiyi* 老子释义 [*Explaining the Meaning of the Laozi*].)

6) *Wei* 微 [minute, subtle] *ming* 明 [bright, obvious, revealing]: Means subtle indicating omens.

Fan Yingyuan: "When [the *Laozi* speaks of] expanding something, strengthening something, *xing* 兴 [rise up, excite] something, and *qu* 取

[take, gain] something there is already the subtle implication of *xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate] something, weakening something, *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] something, and *qu* 取 [take, gain] something. Although the implication is minute, the things and affairs are already quite apparent. Therefore it says: 'This is called *wei* 微 [minute, subtle] *ming* 明 [bright, obvious].' Some regard these few sentences as referring to the art of politics, but this opinion is wrong. Sages observe the movement of *zaohua* 造化 [that creates and transforms, namely, *ziran* 自然 or the self-so], *xiaoxi* 消息 [the rise and fall of things, (usually refers to the five agents)], and *yingxu* 盈虚 [the surplus and deficit (usually, of *yinyang* or Heaven and earth)], and thus discover the way of constant overcoming lies in the soft and weak. Because things reach full maturity they then start to decay." (*Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text*])

Gao Yandi 高延第 (d. 1886): "The first eight sentences are about the subtle indications of how prosperity and disaster, flourishing and languishing rely on one another, and are hidden in one another. The movement of the self-so and heaven and earth look hidden but are actually apparent. '*Wei* 微 [minute, subtle] *ming* 明 [bright, obvious]' denotes the meaning of subtle but disclosing/revealing." (*Laozi zhengyi* 老子证义 [*Evidenced Interpretation of the Laozi*].)

Gao Heng: "These sentences are about the way of heaven (天道). Some take them as evidence for criticizing Laozi as being a schemer, but this is wrong. Laozi warns us not to take extending as long-lasting, not to take strength as reliable, not to take *ju* 举 [raise, promote] as joyful, and not to take *yu* 与 [with, give] as desirable. Thus the text says: 'The soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong.'"

7) The sharp instruments (利器) of a state cannot be shown to people: There are several ways to explain "sharp instruments (利器)." One understanding is that sharp instruments (利器) indicate the way of power (see Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown)). A second understanding is that sharp instruments (利器) indicate rewards and punishments (see the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*]). Another understanding is that sharp instruments (利器) are the ingenuous advantages (利) of sageliness (圣), sagacity (智), humaneness (仁), and duty (义) (see Fan Yingyuan). In the context of this passage my understanding is that we can take "sharp instruments (利器)" to refer to authority and military power. "Showing" here means "showing off."

Xue Wei 薛蕙 (d. 1539): "Sharp instruments (利器) are a metaphor for a state's authority and power. Showing means to display and exhibit, as

> seen in the phrase from the *Chunqiu zhuan* 春秋传 [*Records of Spring and Autumn*] which refers to displaying/exhibiting an army and abusing military power. The hard and strong are on the way to danger and defeat, the soft and weak are on the way to safety and preservation. Can one who holds a state be self-assured in having a powerful state on which to rely? A fish usually survives if it lives in the deep water. It should not be timid and escape from the deep water, otherwise it will be captured by humans, and harm and disaster will reach it. When it comes to a state, it is able to remain peaceful if it holds on to the soft. It should not be conceited regarding its strength and show off to the entire world, otherwise its *shi* 势 [influence and authority] will be exhausted, and its *li* 力 [power and force] subdued, and consequently the state and houses and families cannot be preserved." (*Laozi jijie* 老子集解 [*Collected Interpretations of the Laozi*])

Contemporary Translation

Those who want to gather something in, must first expand and open it outward; those who want to weaken something, must first make it strong and prosperous; those who want to get rid of something, must first raise it up; those who want to take something away, must first give it away. These are subtle indicating omens.

The soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong. Fish cannot leave the deep water, the sharp instruments of a state cannot be casually shown off to people.

Argument

Section one, "wanting to collect things up, requires first expanding it" [another way of saying what the first line of this passage means], is to say that in the process of things and affairs developing, expanding is an omen indicative of closure. Laozi thinks that things and affairs are in a state of continual transformation to their opposite. When things or affairs get to a certain extreme they must start moving towards their opposite. It is just like the way that a flower that blooms will wither (the blossoming of a flower is a sign that it is going to wither). Or like how when the moon is full it will begin to wane (a full moon is a sign that it will wane). So the first section in this chapter expresses Laozi's analysis of how situations develop; this is a description of the famous

Daoist ideas about "when things reach their extremes they must return (物极必反)," "when influence and authority is great it must weaken (势强必弱)." Unfortunately this section is generally misunderstood as containing some scheming [political] ideas, and Han Feizi 韩非子[2] (d. 233 BCE) was the first to develop this misinterpretation. After Han Feizi, the later interpreters could hardly develop clear explanations of this passage, either. However, some, including Fan Yingyuan, Dong Sijing 董思靖 (Song Dynasty, dates unknown), Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623), and others gave accurate explanations of this first section. I will quote Dong Sijing and the Shi Deqing below.

Dong Sijing: "When expansion reaches its limit there must be accumulation (歙), when giving (与) is extreme there must be seizing (夺). This pattern is necessary. To say it 'must surely (必固)' is like saying if something is to be accumulated (歙) it must have already expanded, so then accumulation (歙) follows. This is the pattern of the transformation of flourishing and languishing being the cause of one another. Although the indications and omens are minute, the pattern is quite obvious." (*Laozi daode zhen jing jizhu* 道德真经集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Genuine Daodejing*].)

Shi Deqing: "This describes the natural propensity of things, but people (usually) fail to observe it. Everything in the world reverses after it tends to an extreme. For example, the sun tends towards the afternoon, but must first be bright overhead; the moon tends towards waning, but must first be full; a light tends to burn out, but must first burn bright. This is the natural propensity of all things. Therefore expansion is the sign of accumulation (歙); strength must be the sprout of weakness; to rise up and excite (兴) must be an indication of abandonment (废); giving (与) must be the sign of seizing (夺). From celestial phenomena to human affairs, the principle of all things is natural. But people encounter [this natural principle] without recognition of it, it is thereby called subtle indicating omens." (See *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德经解 [*An Interpretation of Laozi's Daodejing*])

Section two, "the soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong." In terms of the opposition between firm and strong and soft and weak, Laozi prefers the soft and weak. After a deep and broad study of human affairs and the dispositions of things Laozi understands that things which seem soft and weak usually excel in toughness due to their hidden qualities. Similarly, due to their overflowing obviousness, things which seem firm and strong often become exposed and cannot last long. So here Laozi says that the representation of the

2 Tr. note: Here Chen Guying does not include the "*zi* 子" regularly attached to Hanfei's name. Perhaps demonstrating disrespect. For the sake of clarity we have included the "*zi* 子."

soft and weak overcomes the embodiment of the firm and strong. (We also see that the soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong in Chapter 43 and 78.)

Section three, "the sharp instruments (利器) of a state cannot be shown to people," indicates that power and prohibitions are fearful and sharp instruments, they should not be shown off to scare people. Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 226) writes: "Showing people means employing punishment." If the ruler only knows to impose strict punishments and laws on the people, then this is using sharp instruments to show [off to] the people. This is an embodiment of the "firm and strong." Flaunting strength and relying on violence cannot last long.

Thirty-Seven

道常無為而無不為 (1)。侯王若能守之，萬物將自化 (2)。化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸 (3)。無名之樸，夫亦將無欲 (4)。不欲以靜，天下將自正 (5)。

The Dao is constantly *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing],[1] and thereby *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing] (1). If princes and kings can hold to it, then everything can *zi* 自 [self, naturally] *hua* 化 [transform, change] (2). Transform and then desires to do, I *zhen* 镇 [calm, town] it with the nameless simple (朴)[2] (3). The nameless simple (朴), also will have no desires (4). Without desires it is tranquil, everything in the world will *zi* 自 [self, naturally] *zheng* 正 [upright, correct, align, rectify] (5).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing], and thereby *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing]: *Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing] means following by what is natural and not acting unreasonably (妄为) (a point made in Chapter 2). Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 226) comments: "Following what is natural (自然)." "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing]" means that there is nothing which is not done by it [the Dao]; this is the effect produced by "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing]." "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing] and thereby *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing]" means not being unreasonable or arbitrary in action, and thus nothing is not completed. The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version has this sentence as "The Dao is forever *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing] (道恒无为)" and the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions have it as "The Dao is forever nameless (道恒无名)."

1 Tr. note: *Wu wei* 无为 is often translated as "non-action," "non-assertive action," "doing things noncoercively."

2 Tr. note: *Pu* 朴 can also be translated more literally as "uncarved wood."

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Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "Empty, still, and indifferent, that is '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing].' The heavens, earth, humans, and things obtain it in order to function and regenerate,—it is thus *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing]."

Fung Yu-lan (Feng Youlan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "Laozi thinks that all things come from the Dao, but the Dao does not have any purpose or conscious action. The Dao is without purpose and without consciousness. He calls this type of process '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing].' Laozi writes: 'The Dao is constantly *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing], and thereby *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing].' Because the Dao generates all things Laozi writes that the Dao '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing].' Because the Dao has no purpose and no consciousness he writes that the Dao '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing].'" (*Zhongguo zhexue shi xinbian* 中国哲学史新编 [*A New History of Chinese Philosophy*].)

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004): "The Dao is natural, thus it is constantly *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing]. The Dao generates all things, thus it is also *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing]." (*Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*An Outline of Chinese Philosophy*].)

Hu Shi 胡适 (d. 1962): "'The Dao is constantly *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] *wei* 为 [action, doing],[3] and thereby *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] not *wei* 为 [action, doing]' is the central notion of naturalistic cosmology, and it is also a cornerstone of a laissez-faire political philosophy." (*Zhongguo zhexue zhong de kexue jingshen yu fangfa* 中国哲学中的科学精神与方法 [*The Scientific Spirit and Methods in Chinese Philosophy*].)

2) *Zi* 自 [self, naturally] *hua* 化 [transform, change]: Nurture oneself, self-generate and self-bring-up.

3) I *zhen* 镇 [calm, town] it with the nameless simplicity: The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version has "*zhen* 贞 [calm, chaste]" here instead of "*zhen* 镇 [calm, town]." "*Zhen* 贞 [calm, chaste]" means upright, or calm.

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3 Tr. note: *Wu wei* 无为 is often translated as "non-action," "non-assertive action," "doing things noncoercively."

Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植 (b. 1947): "The meaning of '*zhen* 镇 [calm, town]' here might not be that of limiting 'suppression' [another meaning of *zhen* 镇]. The *Shi yu yi* 释诂一 [*Explanations of Old Words Part One*] of the *Guang ya* 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*[4]] records: *zhen* 镇 [calm, chaste] means calm and peaceful." (*Guodian zhujian laozi shixi yu yanjiu* 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*Explanation and Analysis of the Guodian Bamboo Laozi Strips*].)

4) The nameless simple (朴), also will have no desires: The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version does not repeat the phrase "the nameless simple (朴)." Instead of "also will have no desires" it has "and also it will know satisfaction (知足)."

5) Without desires it is tranquil, everything in the world will *zi* 自 [self, naturally] *zheng* 正 [upright, correct, align, rectify]: The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version records it as "Wisdom [and satisfaction] thereby tranquil, and all things will make themselves (自) calm and stable (定)."

Contemporary Translation

The Dao eternally follows by what is natural, while there is nothing that was not done by it. If princes and kings can hold fast to it, then all things will be able to generate and grow by themselves. When that which is able to self-generate and grow starts to desire to act, I just use the Dao's genuineness and simplicity to settle it. Using the Dao's genuineness and simplicity to settle it, desires will not spring up. Without desires springing up it will tend towards tranquility, and all in the world will naturally return to a calm state.

Argument

This chapter brings up an idealistic notion of a government in which things are done non-assertively and there is self-transformation—letting the people develop themselves and manifest themselves.

"Tranquility (静)," "simplicity (朴)," and "not [having] desires (不欲)" all connotate non-assertive action (无为). If the rulers can be tranquil, simple, and free of desires, and do not disturb the people, live in luxury, or expand selfish desires, then the people can live naturally (自然) and be at peace.

4 Tr. note: The *Erya* 尔雅 [*Approaching Correctness*] is the oldest known book of explaining characters—it could be called a dictionary or encyclopedia of Chinese words.

Here Laozi again emphasizes that the rulers' attitude should be one of "non-action (无为)"—following what is natural and not interfering—allowing the people to develop themselves, to accomplish themselves, and at the same time cultivate a custom of genuineness and simplicity. This is the way that such a society is able to tend towards peace and calm.

Thirty-Eight

上德不德 (1)，是以有德；下德不失德 (2)，是以無德。
上德無為而無以為 (3)；{下德無為而有以為 (4)}。
上仁為之而無以為；上義為之而有以為。
上禮為之而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之 (5)。
故失道而后德，失德而后仁，失仁而后義，失義而后禮 (6)。
夫禮者，忠信之薄，而亂之首 (7)。
前識者 (8)，道之華 (9)，而愚之始。是以大丈夫處其厚 (10)，不居其薄 (11)；處其實，不居其華。故去彼取此 (12)。

Higher *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy] is not *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy] (1), therefore is virtuous (德); lower virtue does not let go of virtue (2), therefore it is not virtuous.

Higher virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby does not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] act (为) (3); {lower virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby *yi* 以 [take, depend on] act (为) (4)}.

Higher humaneness (仁) acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] act (为), higher duty (义) acts for it and has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] act (为).

Higher ritual acts for it and there is no response, so sleeves are rolled up and things are *reng* 扔 [pull, cast aside] (5).

Therefore, when the Dao is lost, there is virtue, when virtue is lost, there is humaneness, when humaneness is lost, there is duty (义), when duty is lost, there is ritual (6).

As for ritual, it is the *bao* 薄 [thinness, weakness] of loyalty and trustworthiness, and the head of disorder (7).

Qian 前 [forward, ahead] *shi* 识 [know, realize] *zhe* 者 [one, those] (8), the *hua* 华 [luxuriant, essence] of the Dao (9), and beginning of stupidity. Therefore the great person resides in the thick (10), and does not reside with the thin (11); resides in the actual, and does not reside in the flowery.[1] Thereby casting off that and taking up this (12).

1 Tr. note: "Flowery" here is *hua* 华 [luxuriant, essence], which is also read by Chen Guying as "vain" or "vanity."

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Commentary and Explanation

1) Higher *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy] is not *de* 德 [virtue, efficacy]: People of higher virtue are not conceited about having virtue.

2) Lower virtue does not let go of virtue: People of lower virtue fastidiously adhere to formalized virtue.

   Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "'Does not let go of virtue' means to cling to it and to not transform."

3) Higher virtue does not act [assertively] and thereby not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] act: People of higher virtue follow what is natural and have no intention when doing things. Here "*yi* 以 [take, depend on]" means to be intentional, deliberate.

   Lin Xiyi: "'*Yi* 以 [take, depend on]' means have xin 心 [heart, intentions]. 'Not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] act' means acting without xin 心 [heart, intentions]."

   Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) version, and Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version have "does not not (无不)" instead of "not *yi* 以 [take, depend on]"

   Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972): "The inscribed versions have 'by not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' and that is correct.... The meaning of 'higher virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' is, compared to 'higher virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby not not (无不) act,' superior." (*Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校释 [*Explanation of the Laozi*].) Zhu's theory is correct. The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version has it exactly as "Higher virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action."

4) Lower virtue does not act [assertively] and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action: "Has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" and "not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" are differentiated between having and not having something that makes things [i.e. impresses itself on the action]. Having something that makes things happen is "has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action," and not having something that makes things happen is "not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action." (*Zhongguo zhexue shi xinbian* 中国哲学史新编 [*A New History of Chinese Philosophy*].) The line "lower virtue does not act [assertively] and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" is suspected to be a mistake due to miscopying or an addition later added. The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions do not have this sentence. To follow the arguments of D. C. Lau 刘殿爵 (d. 2010) and Gao

Ming 高明 (d. 2018), I delete this line in accordance with the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions.

D. C. Lau: "The Mawangdui versions have it as such: Higher virtue does not act [assertively] and thereby (in the Jia version the two words above [namely, *wei er* 为而] are missing) not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action. Higher humaneness acts for it and is without (in the Jia version the two words above [namely, er wu 而无] are missing) *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action. Higher duty (the character *yi* 义 in the Yi version was masked and rewritten) acts for it and has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.

Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version has: 'Higher virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action; lower virtue acts for it and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action; higher humaneness acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action, higher duty acts for it and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.'

Fu Yi's version has: 'Higher virtue does not act [assertively] and thereby nothing is not (this "not" was originally not included, but then added based on Ma Xulun's 马叙伦 [d. 1970] version) done, lower virtue acts for it and is thereby without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action. Higher humaneness acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action, lower duty acts for it and has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.'

The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions are tripartite, including higher virtue, higher humaneness, and higher duty. The notions of 'non-[assertive] action (无为)' and 'acts for it (为之)' are relative, and 'not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' and 'has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' are relative as well. Higher virtue is superior as it includes both 'non-[assertive] action' and 'not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.' Higher humaneness is the next highest, although it does not include 'non-[assertive] action' it is capable of 'not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.' Higher duty is lower and can neither act according to 'non-[assertive] action' nor 'not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.' The classification of these three levels is clear. Wang Bi's version adds 'lower virtue' as a fourth level, the result is that 'lower virtue acts for it and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' and 'higher duty acts for it and has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' overlap each other. The Fu Yi version has 'higher virtue' described as 'does not act [assertively] and thereby nothing is not done,' and 'lower virtue' described as 'lower virtue acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action'—which is then repeated in how higher humaneness is described. Thereby it is apparent that the original text of the *Laozi* is tripartite, as exemplified by the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions. Later scholars changed it into a fourfold partition. The revisions are based on

poor methodology and thus suffer repetition. Originally the sentences are contrasted with one another externally, but with the change of 'not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' to 'nothing is not done' in Fu Yi's version, there is a contrast with 'non-[assertive] action', which is a contrast within the sentence itself and does not fit the style of the section. In brief, the line 'does not act [assertively] and thereby nothing is not done', in both the Fu Yi version and in the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*], are clearly revisions made by later scholars."

Gao Ming: "Neither of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions have the sentence about 'lower virtue' but the received versions all have it. This is an important discrepancy between the received version and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions. So what was the original *Laozi* like? If we analyze the text, this chapter mainly expounds the different levels of the four notions—virtue, humaneness, duty, and ritual—from the perspective of the Dao. Virtue is taken as the highest, humaneness is the second highest, and then there is duty, and finally ritual. Virtue, humaneness, duty, and ritual are not only different from one another in a descending manner, but they also generate one another in succession. For example, in what follows it states: 'When virtue is lost then there is humaneness, when humaneness is lost then there is duty, when duty is lost then there is ritual. As for ritual, it is the *bao* 薄 [thinness, weakness] of loyalty and trustworthiness, and the head of disorder.' So what is the difference between virtue, humaneness, duty, and ritual? Laozi uses 'non-[assertive] action' as the standard for judging between these four—taking 'not acting [assertively] and thereby not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' as the highest, 'acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' as the next highest, 'acts for it and has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' next, and 'acts for it and there is no response, so sleeves are rolled up and things are pulled along' as the last. According to analysis of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*, the difference between virtue, humaneness, duty, and ritual is very neat, and the logic is rather clear. Today's version includes a redundant sentence on 'lower virtue'. Not only is the meaning of the word here redundant, but the content is disordered [in terms of the way the text flows]. Additionally, the added sentences of various versions hardly agree with one another, and people's contentions vary a lot. For example, Wang Bi's version has: 'Lower virtue acts for it and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' which overlaps [the content of] 'higher duty acts for it and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action.' Fu Yi's version has 'lower virtue acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action' which overlaps what is said in 'higher humaneness acts for it and is without

yi 以 [take, depend on] action.' From this we can see that the sentence on 'lower virtue' is sheer redundancy. It certainly did not come from the original *Laozi*, but must have been added by later scholars. According to the *Jielaopian* 解老篇 [*Explaining the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*], there are only 'higher virtue,' 'higher humaneness,' 'higher duty,' and 'higher ritual,' without 'lower virtue'. This is the same in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions of the text. All sufficiently demonstrate that the *Laozi* originally should be like this, and there is an error in many of today's versions." (*Laozo boshu jiaozhu* 老子帛书校注 [*Commentary and Annotations to the Mawangdui Laozi*].)

I, [Chen] Guying, comment on the above references: The theories of D.C. Lau and Gao Ming are very cogent indeed. It is correct to follow the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions to adopt the fourfold division, namely "Higher virtue ... higher humaneness ... higher duty ... and higher ritual;" the line "lower virtue does not act [assertively] (无为) and thereby has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" was added during the Han dynasty (later than the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions).

Daoism differentiates social morals into four levels, "the highest," "next [highest]," "next [highest]," (or "next lowest"), and "next lowest" (or "the lowest"). Before the Qin and Han dynasties there was no "fivefold methodology."

For a comparative reading of Chapter 17: "Higher virtue does not act [assertively] and thereby not *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" is related to "*Tai* 太 [great, supreme] *shang* 上 [above, upper, superior] (1), *xia* 下 [below, under, the masses] know they exist" [from Chapter 17]; "higher humaneness acts for it and is without *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" is related to "Those *ci* 次 [second, next, inferior] are adored and praised" [from Chapter 17]; "higher duty (*yi* 义) acts for it and has *yi* 以 [take, depend on] action" is related to "The lesser ones are feared" [from Chapter 17]; "higher ritual acts for it and there is no response" is related to "The lowest of them all are derided" [from Chapter 17].

5) So sleeves are rolled up and things are *reng* 扔 [pull, cast aside]: Reaching one's arms out to force the people to submit.

Lin Xiyi writes: "'*Reng* 扔 [pull, cast aside]' means lead. When the people refuse to follow, pull them with hands and haul them by force. This just describes bending people's will, so it is said 'sleeves are rolled up and things are pulled along'."

6) When the Dao is lost then there is virtue, when virtue is lost then there is humaneness, when humaneness is lost then there is duty, when duty

is lost then there is ritual: The *Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] reads, "When the Dao is lost then virtue is lost, when virtue is lost then humaneness is lost, when humaneness is lost then duty is lost, when duty is lost then ritual is lost." The meaning here is more integrated, so [my] contemporary translation follows it.

7) As for ritual, it is the *bao* 薄 [thinness, weakness] of loyalty and trustworthiness, and the head of disorder: '*Bao* 薄 [thinness, weakness]' means weak, thin, lacking. Being the "head of disorder" means the beginning of disaster.

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992) writes: "In a class-based society, the rulers acted frequently so as to restrict the people. All the established institution and rites were for inhibiting the people and making them subject to the ruler. The rites and institutions are so complicated that people cannot bear them.... when the rites and institutions are established to the utmost, the ruler's method of controlling and enslaving the ruled is then more sophisticated. When the people cannot bear the order [from the ruler], they will rise in group to rebel and kill the ruler."

8) *Qian* 前 [forward, ahead] *shi* 识 [know, realize] *zhe* 者 [one, those]: "*Qian* 前 [forward, ahead] *shi* 识 [know, realize]" refers to the various presupposed rituals and regulations. "*Zhe* 者 [one, those]", used as punctuation, has no meaning here.

Fan Yingyuan writes: "'*Qian* 前 [forward, ahead] *shi* 识 [know, realize]' is similar to foresight [or foreknowledge]. Those who established rites regarded themselves as having foresight, so they created regulations and institutions in order to establish norms of all human affairs, however, this makes people dismiss their natural dispositions in favor of culture."

9) *Hua* 华 [luxuriant, flower]: Means vain and empty, not substantial. Rituals, rites, and regulations and guidelines are the "descending" [i.e. degradation] of the Dao so it is called *hua* 华 [luxuriant, flower].[2]

10) Resides in the thick: Establishes oneself in what is honest and sincere.

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) writes: "'Resides in the thick' means places oneself in what is honest and uncarved."

11) Thin: In other words, superficial and shallow, it refers to "ritual."

12) Casting off that and taking up this: Getting rid of shallow and vain rituals, and taking up what is honest and actual in terms of the Dao and *de* 德 [efficacy, virtue].

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2 Tr. note: *Hua* 华 [luxuriant, essence] literally means "flowery."

Contemporary Translation

People of higher virtue are not conceited about having virtue (德), therefore they really have virtue; people of lower virtue intentionally strive for virtue, and thereby do not reach the realm of virtue.

People of higher virtue follow what is natural and do not have intentions or purposeful action; people of higher humaneness do some things that are actually from non-intentionality, people of higher duty do some things that are from intentionality. People of higher ritual propriety do some things that are not responded to, so they wield arms and force people to follow.

When the Dao is lost then virtue will be lost, when virtue is lost then humaneness will be lost, when humaneness is lost then duty will be lost, when duty is lost then ritual will be lost.

Ritual signals that loyalty and trustworthiness are lacking, and is the beginning of disaster.

The various presupposed regulations are nothing but vainness and emptiness [associated with the degradation of] the Dao (道的虚华), and the beginning of ignorance. Thus, the great person establishes themselves in what is honest and sincere and does not reside with the superficial and shallow; sets their mind and heart on the honest and sincere, and does not reside in the vain and empty. Thereby casting off what is thin and vain, and adopting what is thick and honest.

Argument

The motivation behind this chapter's argument is actually the feeling of continued externalization of interpersonal relationships, as well as the gradual disappearance of the spirit of spontaneous autonomy which leaves only norms that fix thought and action in rigid structures. Laozi's heart-felt words are extremely painful.

Laozi differentiates the levels of "the Dao," "virtue (德)," "humaneness," "duty," and "ritual," in terms of intentionality. The formless and traceless Dao as manifested in things or the functioning of things is virtue (the Dao is the substance and virtue is its function, and the two cannot be separated). Laozi then differentiates virtue in terms of the higher and lower. Higher virtue gleams with intentionlessness, and lower virtue has intentions. "Humaneness and duty" are products of lower virtue, and belong to actions that harbor intentions—they already lose the gleam of naturalness or spontaneity. When it gets to ritual, then there is something that includes striving, and once rituals are lost there

is law (in ancient times "law" actually derived from "ritual") and the internal spirit of a person is completely damaged.

During Laozi's time, rituals had already become shackles, detaining people's hearts and minds, while at the same time being hijacked by those struggling for power. Rituals were tools for usurping reputation, position, and status. Laozi thus criticizes rituals for being "the thinness of loyalty and trustworthiness, and the head of disorder." On the one hand, Laozi criticizes rituals for shackling natural human dispositions, while on the other hand Laozi desires the realm of the Dao—the realm of gleaming naturalness and spontaneity without external restrictions.

Thirty-Nine

昔之得一者　(1)：天得一以清；地得一以寧；神得一以靈；谷得一以盈；萬物得一以生 (2)；侯王得一以為天下正 (3)。
其致之也 (4)，謂 (5) 天無以清，將恐裂；地無以寧，將恐廢 (6)；神無以靈，將恐歇；谷無以盈，將恐竭；萬物無以生，將恐滅；侯王無以正 (7)，將恐蹶。
故貴以賤為本，高以下為基。是以侯王自稱 (8) 孤、寡、不穀 (9)。此非以賤為本邪？非乎？故至譽無譽　(10)。是故不欲琭琭如玉，珞珞如石 (11)。

Formerly existed those who achieved oneness (1): Heaven achieves oneness and is thus clear; Earth achieves oneness and is thus tranquil; spirits achieve oneness and are thus wondrous; the valleys achieve oneness and are thus full; all things achieve oneness and thus grow (2); lords and kings achieve oneness and thus the world is *zheng* 正 [align, rectify] (3).

Qi 其 [it/its, he/his, she/her, they/them, that/those] *zhi* 致 [extend, utmost] *zhi* 之 [it, this, that] *ye* 也 [also, or] (4), it is said (谓) (5) if heaven cannot be clear, it will inevitably shatter; if the earth cannot be tranquil, it will inevitably *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] (6); if the spirits cannot be wondrous, they will inevitably come to an end; if the valleys cannot be full, they will inevitably dry up; if all things cannot grow, they will inevitably extinguish; if the lords and kings cannot be *zheng* 正 [align, rectify] (7); they will inevitably be overthrown.

Thus, the noble takes the base as its root, the higher takes the lower as its foundation. For this reason the lords and kings *zi* 自 [self, naturally] *cheng* 称 [address, fit] (8) the orphaned, the widowed, and he who is without possessions (不谷) (9). Is this not how the base is taken as the root? Is it not? Thus, utmost acclaim lacks acclaim (10). Therefore, not desiring *lu lu* 琭琭 [precious, luster] like jade, *luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, honorable] like stone (11).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Achieve oneness: Also means achieving the Dao (Chapter 41 reads "The Dao generates oneness").

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "'Oneness' is the Dao."

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Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "One is the number of the Dao. 'Achieving oneness' is like saying Achieving the Dao." (*Laozi da jie* 老子达解 [*Comprehensive Interpretation of the Laozi*])

2) All things achieve oneness and thus grow: [My] comment: The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions do not have this sentence. Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) thinks that this sentence is parallel to [and thus legitimized by] the sentence below, "if all things cannot grow, they will inevitably extinguish," and that it was added after Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) commentary. Gao Ming's theory can be reserved [for consideration].

3) *Zheng* 正 [align, rectify]: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version has this as *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]. Heshang Gong's, Jing Long's 景龙 (d. 1101), Jing Fu era (892–893), Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41 AD), and Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) versions, as well as many ancient versions, all have *zheng* 正 [align, rectify] here. The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions both have "*zheng* 正 [align, rectify]."

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "'*Zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' is *zheng* 正 [align, rectify]. Wang Bi's version and Guo Yun's 郭云 (d. 1374) version, are identical to ancient versions. Having '*zheng* 正 [align, rectify]' instead of '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]', is because it was taboo for later scholars to directly use the personal names of emperors or elders.

Lao Jian 劳健 (d. 1951): "Note: The commented and annotated version [of the *Laozi*] in the *Daozang* 道藏 [*Daoist Cannon*] has the word as '*zheng* 正 [align, rectify]', the annotations read: 'The character was likely to be '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' originally, but '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' is the same as *zheng* 正 [align, rectify].' The Kaiyuan stone carvings changed into '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' and Fan's point that 'because it was taboo for later scholars to directly use the personal names of emperors or elders' is wrong."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "Chapter 45 reads: 'Tranquil and calm, to align (正) all under heaven' and the meaning is the same as what we find in this sentence. The *Zhi yi* 执一 [*Grasping Oneness*] chapter of the *Lü Shi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Annals of Lü Buwei*] records: 'Grasping (执) oneness and thus the world is *zheng* 正 [align, rectify].' The syntax is aligned with what we find in the *Laozi*." Lao Jian and Gao Heng are correct.

4) *Qi* 其 [it/its, he/his, she/her, they/them] *zhi* 致 [extend, utmost] *zhi* 之 [it, this, that] *ye* 也 [also, or]: Means to infer as such. The word "*ye* 也 [also,

or]" is missing in the received version of the *Laozi*, but has been added in accordance with the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions.

Gao Heng: "'*Zhi* 致 [extend, utmost]' means *tui* 推 [push, infer], to infer that which follows." (*Laozi zheng gu* 老子正诂 [*Collation and Explanation of the Laozi*])

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "'*Qi* 其 [it/its, he/his, she/her, they/them] *zhi* 致 [extend, utmost] *zhi* 之 [it, this, that] *ye* 也 [also, or]' seems to initiate what follows, not to summarize what is said previously, and Gao Heng is correct."

5) It is said (谓): In the received version of the *Laozi* this character [it is said (谓)] does not appear, it has been added in accordance with the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions. Both *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions have "it is said (谓)" written as "*wei* 胃 [stomach]."

6) *Fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]: Wang Bi's version has *fa* 发 [collapse, set out] here. It is amended here according to Yang Lingfeng's theory.

Liu Shipei 刘师培 (d. 1919): "'*Fa* 发 [collapse, set out]' is read as '*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste].' ... '[I am] afraid it will *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]' denotes, to collapse and be destroyed, namely, that is, the collapse of the land. '*Fa* 发 [collapse, set out]' is a simplified form of '*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste].'" (*Laozi jiao bu* 老子斠补 [*Corrections and Supplements to the Laozi*].)

Yan Lingfeng: "What Liu Shipei says is correct. The text of the *Laozi* uses the character '*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]' rather than as the character '*fa* 发 [collapse, set out].' For example, in Chapter 18: 'When the great Dao is abandoned (废).' And in Chapter 36 'if [one] wants to *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste] it,' it was written as '*fa* 发 [collapse, set out]' instead of '*fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]' because the character '*fei* 废' lost its component '*guang* 广', so there is an error. The *Shi jun lan* 恃君览 [*Relying on Rulers*] chapter of the *Lü Shi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Annals of Lü Buwei*] reads: 'heaven undoubtedly will wane (衰), diminish (嗛), collapse (废), and goes down (伏)'. This demonstrates that heaven can certainly be associated with *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]. Thus, I restore the original text by changing fa 发 [collapse, set out] into *fei* 废 [abandon, collapse, waste]."

7) *Zheng* 正 [align, rectify]: Wang Bi's version has this as "high and noble." Fan Yingyuan's and Zhao Zhijian's 赵至坚 (dates unknown) versions have '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' here.

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920): "the sentence should be 'if the lords and kings cannot be *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright].' '*Zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' is mistaken as 'noble.' Later people noticed that the next sentence is 'the

noble take the base as its root, the higher takes the lower as its foundation,' and thought that it must be a direct continuation from what was written previously, so they subjectively added the word 'higher/high' next to the word 'noble'. The errors follow one another, and the meaning is not consistent." (*Du laozi zhaji* 读老子札记 [*Notes on Reading the Laozi*].)

Yan Linfeng: "What Yi Shunding says is correct. Cheng Dachang's 程大昌 (d. 1195) version has 'if the lords and kings cannot be *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright] for the world.' Fan Yingyuan records it as 'for (为) *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright].' Zhao Zhijian's version has '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' instead of '*zheng* 正 [align, rectify].' '*Zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' is the correct word here, which perfectly corresponds to the line above, 'lords and kings achieve oneness and thus the world is *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright].' The text should be corrected according to Zhao Zhijian's version." According to Fan Yingyuan the character should be *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright] here. Fan writes: "This is how ancient versions were [i.e., with '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright].'" In ancient texts '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' and '*zheng* 正 [align, rectify]' were interchangeable, the above sentence "lords and kings achieve oneness and thus the world is *zheng* 正 [align, rectify]," means that the passage should follow this example as a rule, changing '*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright]' to '*zheng* 正 [align, rectify]' (see note 3 above).

8) *Zi* 自 [self, naturally] *cheng* 称 [say, fit]: Wang Bi's version has "*zi* 自 [self, naturally] *wei* 谓 [name, call]." Fan Yingyuan's version, Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, and Jiao Xiong's 焦雄 (dates unknown) version all have "*wei* 谓 [name, call]" for "*cheng* 称 [say, fit]."

Yi Shunding: "'*Zi* 自 [self, naturally] *wei* 谓 [name, call]' should be '*zi* 自 [self, naturally] *cheng* 称 [say, fit].' Chapter 42 states: 'What people hate [to be], is the orphan, the widower, the unworthy, and kings and rulers take them as their names.' So here it must be *cheng* 称 [say, fit] as well. In Gao You's 高诱 (d. 212) commentary of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] it is '*cheng* 称 [say, fit].' In the *Wen xuan* 文选 [*Selections of Refined Literature*] the quote reads 'lords and kings *zi* 自 [self, naturally] *cheng* 称 [say, fit] (8) the orphaned and widowed, and are not provided for.' This is all evidence [for reading '*cheng* 称 [say, fit]' here]." The *Qi ce* 齐策 [*Strategies of Qi*] chapter of the *Zhan guo ce* 战国策 [*Strategies of the Warring States*] also has the quote with "*cheng* 称 [say, fit]."

9) Orphaned, widowed, and without possessions (不谷): These are all humble words for kings and lords. "Orphaned" and "widowed" are humble ways for saying that one is isolated and lacks *de* 德 [efficacy, virtue]. "Without possessions" means *shan* 善 [good, virtuous, nice].

Fan Yingyuan: "*Gu* 谷 [here, in 'without possessions (不谷)'] means *shan* 善 [good and virtuous]. It is also another way of referring to all the different types of crops. Many kings and lords in the Spring and Autumn period say they are 'without possessions (不谷)'."

10) Utmost acclaim lacks acclaim: The highest acclaim does not need to be praised.

In the Wang Bi and the received version "utmost acclaim lacks acclaim" is "the utmost number of *yu* 與 [popular, public] lacks *yu* 與 [popular, public]." Here "*yu* 與 [popular, public]" can be understood as a substitute for "acclaim [*yu* 誉]." (Zhang Songru (*Laozi jiaodu* 老子校读 [*Collated Laozi*])

Note: in Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the *Daode zhenjing cijie* 道德真经次解 [*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*], Wang Pang's 王雱 (d. 1076), Fan Yingyuan's, Lü Huiqing's 吕慧卿 (d. 1111), and even Wu Cheng's 吴澄 (d. 1333) versions all have "acclaim [*yu* 誉]" for "*yu* 與 [popular, public]." The *Zhi le pian* 至乐篇 [*Utmost Happiness*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] records: "Thus it is said: 'Utmost acclaim lacks acclaim.'" "Thus it is said" is referring to the *Laozi*, showing that "utmost acclaim lacks acclaim" might be in the original text from the *Laozi*.

Fan Yingyuan: "Acclaim [*yu* 誉], another way to say beautiful, Wang Bi's version agrees with the ancient version. Chen Bixu 陈碧虚 (d. 1094) writes: 'According to the ancient text it should be acclaim [*yu* 誉].'" (*Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentaries to the Ancient Laozi Daodejing*])

Tao Shaoxue 陶邵学 (d. dates unknown): "Wu Cheng's version has 'utmost acclaim lacks acclaim,' and this meaning makes sense." (*Jiao laozi* 校老子 [*Examining the Laozi*].)

Gao Yandi 高延第 (d. 1886): "Utmost acclaim lacks acclaim:" Heshang Gong's version has 'the utmost number of *che* 车 [vehicle] lacks *che* 车 [vehicle].' Wang Bi's version and the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] have 'the utmost number of *yu* 與 [popular, public] lacks *yu* 與 [popular, public]'. Each have their own one-sidedness, and do not fit with the text. In the *Shiwen* 释文 [*Explanations of the Classics*] Lu Deming 陆德明 (d. 630) comments, on the word 'acclaim,' 'praise or blame' [i.e. it means 'praise' as in 'praise or blame' (毁誉)]. And the original text also had 'acclaim.' 'Acclaim (誉)' is mistaken as '*yu* 與 [popular, public].' And '*yu* 與 [popular, public]' is mistaken as *che* 车 [vehicle]. Later people actually thought that the *Shiwen* 释文 [*Explanations of the Classics*] was wrong. The *Zhi le pian* 至乐篇 [*Utmost Happiness*] chapter

of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Book of Master Zhuang*] records: "Thus it is said: 'Utmost acclaim lacks acclaim.' And below this it continues 'The heavens do not act [无为], and thereby are clear and bright, the earth does not act [无为], and thereby is tranquil' so on and so forth, which exactly quotes from this chapter and can serve as proof." (*Laozi zhengyi* 老子证义 [*Evidenced Interpretation of the Laozi*].) What Gao says is convincing, and because of the passage from the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we should read this sentence as "utmost acclaim lacks acclaim."

11) Therefore, not desiring *lu lu* 琭琭 [precious, luster] like jade, *luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, honorable] like stone: The word "therefore" is added according to the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* versions. "*Lu lu* 琭琭 [precious, luster]" describes the shininess of jade. "*Luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, upright]" describes the hardness of a rock.

Gao Heng: "*Lu lu* 琭琭 [precious, luster] describes the beauty of jade. *Luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, honorable] describes the ugliness of rocks.... The *Feng yan zhuan* 冯衍传 [*Biography of Feng Yan*] chapter of the *Houhanshu* 后汉书 [*Book of the Later Han*] states: 'Not *lu lu* 碌碌 [rocky, mediocre] like jade, *luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, honorable] like a stone.' Li Xian 李贤 (d. 684) comments: 'Describing jade as *lu lu* 碌碌 [rocky, mediocre] because people take it as precious, describing stone as *luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, honorable] because people take it as base.' This commentary is close [to mine]."

Zhang Songru: "'Not desiring *lu lu* 琭琭 [precious, luster] like jade, (and settling) *luo luo* 珞珞 [hard, honorable] like stone.' These are descriptions that the appearance of the personality of a ruler who grasps the Dao will have according to Laozi. The type of person being described here naturally reflects the ideas regarding 'non-action though ordered (无为而治),' 'utmost emptiness (致虚),' and 'guarded stillness (守静) Chapter 16' in the *Laozi*."

Contemporary Translation

There have always been those who achieved "oneness" (the Dao): The heavens achieve "oneness" and are thus clear and bright; the earth achieves "oneness" and is thus still and tranquil; spirits achieve "oneness" and are thus ingenious and wonderful; river valleys achieve "oneness" and are plentiful and full; all things achieve "oneness" and are thus cultivated and nourished; lords and kings achieve "oneness" and can make the world settled and quiet.

In other words, if the heavens cannot maintain its clarity and brightness, then they will likely shatter; if the earth cannot maintain its stillness and

tranquility, then it will likely collapse; if spirits cannot maintain their ingenuity and wonderfulness, then they will likely disappear; if the river valleys cannot maintain their plentifulness and fullness, then they will likely dry up; if all things cannot maintain their cultivation and nourishment, then they will likely become extinguished; if lords and kings cannot maintain their clarity and stillness, then they will likely be toppled.

Therefore, the noble takes the base as its root, the higher takes the lower as its foundation. In this way lords and kings refer to themselves as "orphaned," "widowed," and "without possessions." Is not this what it means to take the low and base as the root? Is it not? Thus, the highest acclaim is formless praise. In this way [one does] not want to be like the luster of jade, but would rather be like the stability of normal rocks.

Argument

The first half of this chapter discusses the function of the Dao—clearly stating that the Dao composes those aspects that no thing in the world can be without. The most important point here is about how the kings and lords achieve the Dao. The second half reminds kings and lords to embody the base and humble characteristics of the Dao. This is to say that the ruler should reside in what is lower, be at home in being last, and humble. People who have the Dao should be like the foundation of a tall building, they should have a camel's spirit,[1] "be honorable like stone," be simple and unadorned, and have perseverance.

1 Tr. note: This is in reference to Nietzsche's metaphor of the spirit of the camel as that which asks "What is heaviest … that I may take it upon me and rejoice in my strength."

Forty

反者道之動 (1)；弱 (2) 者道之用。
天下萬物生於有 (3)，有生於無 (4)。

Fan 反 [opposite, reversal] is the movement of the Dao (1); *ruo* 弱 [weak, decline] is the function of the Dao.

All the things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being] (3), *you* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] (4).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] is the movement of the Dao: *Fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] is often interpreted in two ways. Firstly, as opposite, or opposing. Secondly, as returning. For example Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) writes: "*Fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] is returning (复), and stillness." Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) writes: "*Fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] means revolve, it means to loop or go round." In Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) comments on Chapter 30 he writes: "yet *fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] to non-assertive action (无为)." And he comments on Chapter 65: "*Fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] to what is genuine." Here in both, *fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] is read as "returning." In Laozi's philosophy there is a lot of discussion about the opposing sides of things, about how contrary parts function as complementing one another, and the regularity of cyclical movements and returning. Here "*fan* 反 [opposite, reversal]" is "returning." The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version also has it as "returning, the Dao's servant 僮 (movement)."
2) *Ruo* 弱 [weak, decline]: Weak, pliable.
3) *You* 有 [presence, having, being]: The meaning of "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" here is the same as in Chapter 1, which reads "*You* 有 [presence, being] is the name of the mother of all things." However, "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" here does not have the same meaning as it does in Chapter 2, which reads "*You* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] are mutually generative." or in Chapter 11, which reads "*you* 有 [presence, having, being] benefits." The "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" in Chapter 2 and Chapter 11 refer to existent things in the phenomenal world; whereas here "*you* 有

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[presence, having, being]" refers to the existence of the Dao as something metaphysical.

4) *You* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]: In the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version this sentence, and the one preceding it, reads: "All things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]." In the received version we have the proposition that "*you* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]," which might have been formed later.

Fung Yu-lan (Feng Youlan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "Anything that comes to be is a being, and there are many beings. The coming to be of beings implies that first of all there is Being. These words 'first of all,' here do not mean first in a point of time, but first in a logical sense.... In the same way, the being of all things implies the being of Being. This is the meaning of Lao Tzu's saying: 'All things in the world come into being from Being (*Yu* [*You*]); and Being comes into being from Non-being (*Wu*).' (Ch. 40.) This saying of Lao Tzu does not mean that there was a time when there was only Non-being, and that then there came a time when Being came into being from Non-being. It simply means that if we analyze the existence of things, we see there must first be Being before there can be any things. *Tao* is the unnamable, is Non-being, and is that by which all things come to be. Therefore, before the being of Being, there must be Non-being, from which Being comes into being. What is here said belongs to ontology, not to cosmology."[1]

Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植 (b. 1947): "If we take '*de* 德 [virtue, efficacy]' as the essence of '*you* 有 [presence, having, being],' and the Dao as the origin of '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being],' then we should say that all things are 'generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being].' This '*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]' is not prior to '*you* 有 [presence, having, being],' but rather serves as the origin of the existence of all things in concert with '*you* 有 [presence, having, being].'" (*Guodian zhujian laozi shixi yu yanjiu* 郭店竹简老子释析与研究 [*Analysis, Explanation, and Research on the Guodian Bamboo Slips Laozi*] page 26.)

1 Tr. note: This is quoted directly from Feng Youlan's *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 90). Chen Guying is quoting from one of the Chinese translations of this book. It was originally written in English by Feng, and I have therefore quoted from the original.

Zhao Jianwei 赵建伟 (b. 1957): "The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version has: "All things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]." The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] and received version both have: "All the things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], *you* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]." There is an extra '*you* 有 [presence, having, being]' in the latter two versions. On the surface it seems that an extra '*you* 有 [presence, having, being]' was added to the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* and received version, or that the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version is missing a '*you* 有 [presence, having, being].'

However, if we look closely we can discover that the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* and received version might have the second "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" added on purpose, yet in the original version "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" is not repeated. The reason is as follows: Firstly, "all the things in the world" is the formal subject of the two occurrences of "generated" (namely "Patient-as-the-subject sentence," which is also called a passive sentence, so everything in the world is generated from both "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" and "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]"); with an extra "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" the two occurrences of "generated" have already been separated from one another. Secondly, if we read it as: "All the things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], *you* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]," then "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" is being purposely downgraded, and "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" becomes the more dominant. Actually Laozi says very clearly, in Chapter 2, that "*You* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] are mutually generative." The two are then on par with one another. Thirdly, in the first chapter Laozi states "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, non-being] is the name of the beginning of heaven and earth. *You* 有 [presence, being]' is the name of the mother of all things." And also, in Chapter 52: "The world has a *shi* 始 [beginning, start, initiate] (1): it is considered the mother of [all in] the world," here we have "*shi* 始 [beginning, start, initiate]" and "mother" as on par with one another, and from this we can determine that "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" and "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" are also on par with one another.

In addition, Chen Guying also writes in an article on the *Guodian Bamboo Slips*, *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*, and received versions:

"Although there is only a one word difference, but in terms of philosophical meaning there is a huge difference. The former belongs to an issue of how things are generated, and the latter belongs to an ontological theory. In terms of the general thought presented in the *Laozi*, the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version is correct." (*Guodian zhujian*《*laozi*》*jiao shi* 郭店竹简《老子》校释 [*Annotations to the Guodian Bamboo Laozi*] in *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 [*Research in Daoist Culture*], volume 17.

Contemporary Translation

The movement of the Dao is cyclical, the function of the Dao soft and weak.

All things are generated from presence, and presence is generated from non-presence.

Argument

Firstly, we have "*Fan* 反 [opposite, reversal] is the movement of the Dao." Here the word "*fan* 反 [opposite, reversal]" is ambiguous. It can mean opposite or reversal (because "*fan* 反 [opposite, reversal]" is "returning [返]"). However, in Laozi's philosophy, both of these meanings are implied, "*fan* 反 [opposite, reversal]" connotes both concepts: opposing and conflicting as well as circulation and returning. These two concepts are very important in Laozi's philosophy. Laozi thinks that the movement and change of things and affairs in the natural realm must rely on some rules, and one of the most general rules is "*fan* 反 [opposite, reversal]": things and affairs develop towards their opposite, and everything develops from its opposite. Everything has its opposite, and it is precisely because of this opposite that things are manifest. He also thinks that "things complemented by their opposites" is the driving functional power that moves things and affairs to change and develop. Laozi also thinks that the body of Dao is in perpetual motion, things and events are constantly starting and becoming new in their movement and developing.

Secondly, we have: "*Ruo* 弱 [weak, decline] is the function of the Dao." When the Dao generates and assists things, these things have absolutely no sense of being pushed by some external power. Being "soft and weak" describes that when the Dao is moving and operating there will be no pressure [i.e. things will not feel its pressure].

Thirdly, we have: "All the things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], *you* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from

wu 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]." Here "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" and "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" both indicate the Dao, the meaning here is the same as it is in the first chapter. "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" and "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" are the lively process of formlessness coming to have form through which the Dao produces the heavens, earth, and all things. Here we are told about the origin of the generation of all things.

Forty-One

上士闻道，勤而行之；中士闻道，若存若亡；下士闻道，大笑之。不笑不足以为道。故建言 (1) 有之：
明道若昧；
进道若退；
夷道若颣 (2)；
上德若谷；
大白若辱 (3)；
广德若不足；
建德若偷 (4)；
质真若渝 (5)；
大方无隅 (6)；
大器晚成；
大音希声；
大象无形；
道隐无名。
夫唯道，善贷且成。

Higher people hear the Dao, diligence and walk it; middle people hear the Dao, some preserved some lost; lower people hear the Dao, great laughter at it. [If they] did not laugh it would not be sufficient to be taken as the Dao. Therefore, *jian* 建 [establish, build] language (1) we have this:

The bright Dao seems dark;
The advancing Dao seems to retreat;
The *yi* 夷 [smooth, level] Dao seems rugged and uneven *lei* 頹 [knotted, flawed] (2);
The higher virtuosity (德) seems like a valley;
The most white seems *ru* 辱 [dirty, insult] (3);
Vast virtuosity seems insufficient;
Jian 建 [build, construct] virtuosity seems *tou* 偷 [take, in secret] (4);
Quality genuineness seems to *yu* 渝 [change, understand] (5);
Great squares lack *yu* 隅 [corner, part] (6);
Great vessels are late to be completed;
Great sound is scare of sound;
Great shape lacks form;
The Dao is hidden without a name.
Only the Dao, good at *dai* 贷 [lend, borrow] and complete (7).

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Commentary and Explanation

1) *Jian* 建 [establish, build] language: Expound one's ideas in writing.

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "*Jian* 建 [establish, build] language, means expounding one's ideas in writing. Since ancient times, those who expounded their ideas in writing had such a few words."

2) The *yi* 夷 [smooth, level] Dao seems rugged and uneven *lei* 纇 [knotted, flawed]: "*Yi* 夷 [smooth, level] Dao" means the smooth and even Dao. "*Lei* 纇 [knotted, flawed]" is not smooth.

Zhang Shunhui 张舜徽 (d. 1992): "The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: '*Lei* 类, the segments on a knot.' A knot [on silk] has segments and is thereby not even, so this is extended to be the name for something uneven."

3) The most white seems *ru* 辱 [dirty, insult]: *Ru* 辱 [dirty, insult] is used for *ru* 黀 [black, dirty]. Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version and Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version have *ru* 黀 [black, dirty] (Fan Yingyuan writes: "*Ru* 黀 [black, dirty] means black dirt." The ancient version is like this).

4) *Jian* 建 [build, construct] virtuosity seems *tou* 偷 [take, in secret]: "*Jian* 建 [build, construct]" has the same meaning as "*jian* 健 [robust, invigorate]." "*Tou* 偷 [take, in secret]" can be understood as "*duo* 惰 [lazy, decline]." "*Jian* 建 [build, construct] virtuosity seems *tou* 偷 [take, in secret]" means that the robust and vigorous virtuosity seems slack and weak.

Yu Yue 俞越 (d. 41): "'*Jian* 建 [build, construct]' can be read as '*jian* 健 [robust, invigorate].' The *Shiming* 释名 [*Explanation of Names*] records: '*Jian* 健 [robust, invigorate] is the same as *jian* 建 [build, construct] here, being able to build and act.' Because the pronunciation of '*jian* 健 [robust, invigorate]' and '*jian* 建 [build, construct]' are the same, so they are used interchangeably. '*Jian* 建 [build, construct] virtuosity seems *tou* 偷 [take, in secret]' says that the robust and vigorous virtuosity seems, on the contrary, lazy."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "'*Jian* 建 [build, construct] virtuosity seems *tou* 偷 [take, in secret],' means to say that strong virtuosity seems weak."

5) Quality genuineness seems to *yu* 渝 [change, understand]: "*Yu* 渝 [change, understand]" means change.

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1 Tr. note: The word *ru* 黀 is extremely rare, which is why Chen Guying includes Fan Yingyuan's definition. (*Ru* 黀 is not even included in Google's typing system for Chinese characters, nor is it on Baidu.com's dictionary, nor can the iPhone display it.)

Liu Shipei 刘师培 (d. 1919): "'The above text says 'vast virtuosity seems insufficient; *Jian* 建 [build, construct] virtuosity seems *tou* 偷 [take, in secret].' Since these are parallel sentences, there is some speculation that 'genuine' should be 'virtuosity.' The word 'virtuosity (德)' could be *de* 悳 [which means *de* 德], because it is visually similar to 'genuine (真),' so this could be a copying error. Quality virtuosity, *jian* 建 [build, construct] virtuosity, and vast virtuosity are uniform." This theory can be kept for the time being.

6) Great squares lack *yu* 隅 [corner, part]: The utmost squares seem to have no corners.

7) Good at *dai* 贷 [lend, borrow] and complete: "*Dai* 贷 [lend, borrow]" means "to give." Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version has "good at *dai* 贷 [lend, borrow] and complete" the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version has "Good at starting and good at completing."

Contemporary Translation

Higher people hear the Dao and work hard to actualize it; middle people hear the Dao and half believe it and half doubt it; lower people hear the Dao and laugh. If they did not laugh at it, then it would not be sufficient to be taken as the Dao. Therefore, in ancient times, those who expounded on their ideas in writing described the Dao as thus:

The bright and luminous Dao seems dark and shady;
The advancing and progressing Dao seems to retreat and fall back;
The flat and even Dao seems rugged and uneven;
The sublime and lofty virtuosity seems like a low river valley;
The most pure and clean spirit seems to have endured what is dirty;
Vast and extensive virtuosity seems insufficient;
Robust and vigorous virtuosity seems cowardly and weak;
The quality of pure genuineness seems to vary according to things;
The utmost squares seem to have no corners;
Valuable vessels are always the last to be completed;
The greatest sound is, paradoxically, without sounds that can be heard;
The greatest shape is, paradoxically, without a form that can be seen;
The Dao is secluded, hidden, and without a name.
Only the Dao is good at assisting all things and good at making them complete.

Argument

The Dao is hidden and difficult to see, the characteristics that it does expose are so abnormal that normal people, when hearing the Dao, cannot easily comprehend it.

From "the bright and luminous Dao seems dark and shady" to "robust and vigorous virtuosity seems cowardly and weak" we have descriptions of the Dao and virtuosity (德) as deep, introverted, empty and void, and latent. Its manifestation is not an external flaunt, but reflective and reactive, so it is not easily perceived by ordinary people. "The greatest sound is, paradoxically, without sounds that can be heard; the greatest shape is, paradoxically, without a form that can be seen" are metaphors for the Dao's hiddenness, for not having a shape or form that can be seen.

Forty-Two

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物 (1)。萬物負陰而抱陽 (2)，沖氣以為和 (3)。
【人之所惡，唯孤、寡、不谷，而王公以為稱。故物或損之而益，或益之而損。
人之所教，我亦教之。強梁者不得其死，吾將以為教父。】

The Dao generates oneness, oneness generates twoness, twoness generates threeness, threeness generates all things (1). Everything shoulders *yin* and embraces *yang*[1] (2), surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] forms a harmony (3).

{What people hate [to be], is the orphan, the widower, the unworthy, and kings and rulers take them as their names. Thus things are sometimes diminished as they are benefited, or are benefitted as they are diminished. What people teach I also teach. The overly bold do not get their [timely] death, I use them as fathers of teaching.}

Commentary and Explanation

1) The Dao generates oneness, oneness generates twoness, twoness generates threeness, threeness generates all things: This is Laozi's famous cosmogony. Here the process whereby Dao generates all things is described. In this process we see the move from the simple to the complex, which is why Laozi uses the numbers one, two, and three as substitutive references. Laozi's use of the numbers one, two, and three are not necessarily indicative of something specific. As Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) states, "The *Laozi*'s one, two, and three, are just three numbers that represent the Dao generating all things, they show that more generation begets more things." (*Laozi jiao gu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*])

This section is about the process whereby the Dao generates all things. If we compare it with Chapter 40, then we can take "the Dao" in "the Dao generates oneness" as "non-presence (无)," and "oneness" can thereby be explained as "presence (有)." (In his *Daode zhenjing lun* 道德真经论 [*On*

1 Tr. note: *Fu* 负 means to carry something behind you, or on one's back, *bao* 抱 means to hold, hug, or carry something in one's arms.

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the Authentic Daodejing] Sima Guang 司马光 (d. 1086) writes, "The Dao generates oneness, from non-presence entering presence"). The presence and non-presence in Chapter 40 ("All the things in the world are generated from presence, presence is generated from non-presence") and the presence and non-presence in Chapter 1 ("*Wu* 无 [non-presence, non-being] is the name of the beginning of heaven and earth. *You* 有 [presence, being] is the name of the mother of all things"), are all indicative of the Dao. Accordingly, "twoness" here speaks to metaphysical "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)." (The idea of the Dao generating all things in Chapter 40 precisely indicates the process whereby the metaphysical Dao moves into the concrete, in terms of the notions of "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)"). When the metaphysical "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)" move into the concrete and become non-metaphysical they then became what Chapter 2 records as "*You* 有 [presence, having, being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] are mutually generative," and what is generated thereby becomes "threeness." While this explanation might not be clear enough, it does fit what Laozi originally means. Distinctions of levels or tiers in Laozi's time were relatively simple. For example, social classes were mostly distinguished in two levels, people were either part of the ruling class or not, which is similar to the distinction between the Dao and everything else. An intermediary is lacking here, it was not until after Zhuangzi's 庄子 (d. 295 BCE) time that theories concerning the transformation of *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] were developed to describe how the Dao and all things are related. In fact, there are some hints at using "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)" to describe oneness, twoness, and threeness in the *Qi wu lun* 齐物论 [*Equalizing Things and Arguments*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] in which it is written: "Oneness and language make twoness, twoness and oneness make threeness, carrying on like this, the most skillful chronicler could not get [to the end of it].... Therefore from non-presence (无) we get to presence (有), and go on to threeness." Here, the last line, "from non-presence (无) we get to presence (有) ..." describes the oneness, twoness, and threeness. Accordingly, we can take this part of Chapter 42 as saying: The Dao is independent and without a complementary partner ("the Dao generates oneness"), a chaotic and undifferentiated mixture that contains both "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)" ("oneness generates twoness"). The Dao goes from being formless to having form, thus presence and non-presence generate one another and form new thing(s) ("twoness generates threeness"), and

all things are products of this state where presence and non-presence generate one another ("threeness generates all things").

In the past there have been various exegeses of this passage in the *Laozi*, but most use notions that came about after the Han Dynasty to explain it. For example, using "original *qi* (元气)" to explain "oneness", and the "heavens and earth (天地) or yin yang (阴阳)" to explain "twoness", and "harmonization (和气)" to explain "threeness". Of course this type of explanation is relatively clear, however, "original *qi* (元气)" and "harmonization (和气)" are common words in Han writings (using yin yang generated from the heavens and earth to explain the generation of all things is already found earlier in the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*]). The Han Dynasty text *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] provides a relatively clear explanation of Chapter 42. In the chapter *Tian wen* 天文 [*Patterns of Heaven*], the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] records, "The Dao begins in oneness. As oneness cannot generate [things], thereby, it divides to yin and yang. Yin and yang harmoniously combine and all things are generated, thus it is said 'the Dao generates oneness, oneness generates twoness, twoness generates threeness, threeness generates all things'." Here the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] uses yin and yang to explain "twoness;" the harmonious combination of yin and yang to explain "threeness"; and "the Dao begins in oneness" says that Dao and "oneness" are one and the same concept. The *Yuan dao* 原道 [*Investigating the Dao*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] records: "That which is called formless, can also be called oneness, that which is called oneness has no match in the world." Clearly "oneness" is used to explain the formless Dao, and it is taken as unique and without any match. Taking "oneness" as a name for the Dao is found over and over in the *Laozi* (for example, in Chapter 14 we have "they are muddled and one [混而为一]," in Chapter 39 we have "The heavens get oneness and are thus clear; the earth gets oneness and is thus tranquil"). Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "Oneness is the Dao, nominally it is named the Dao, numerically it is named oneness." There is little doubt about taking "oneness" as a number to represent the Dao. But as to what "twoness" indicates, there are many disparate discussions. As mentioned above, "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)" have been used. While this fits with the original meaning of the *Laozi*, it still cannot adequately describe how the metaphysical "non-presence (无)" and "presence (有)" can be brought into the actual world. Since in the phrase "presence (有) and non-presence (无) generated one another" [which appears in

Chapter 2], presence and non-presence are already concrete things in the phenomenal world, the question of how they are produced from formless metaphysical presence (有) and non-presence (无) cannot be concretely expounded. Thereby, most scholars rely upon the *Huainanzi*'s 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] explanation in which he uses "yin and yang" to describe "twoness". However, looking at the entire *Laozi* besides this chapter in which we have "everything shoulders yin and embraces yang", we do not find yin and yang anywhere else (it is only starting with the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] that yin and yang become important and are frequently used). Yet the words "the heavens and earth (天地)" are seen frequently in the *Laozi*, and "the heavens and earth (天地)" and "Dao" are often mentioned together. For example, Chapter 6 records: "The gate of *xuan* 玄 [dark, deep, profound] *pin* 牝 [female], it is called the root of heaven and earth." And in Chapter 25 we have "There is a thing formed undifferentiatedly, born before heaven and earth (有物混成，先天地生)." Thereby we can also find evidence for reading "twoness" as "the heavens and earth (天地)" in Laozi's own writings. Regarding the difficulty in explaining "threeness", it is probably best to use the *Tian zi fang* 田子方 [*Tian Zifang*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] as the basis for our understanding. Here the *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] of yin and yang is distributed from the heavens and earth. In this way, we can read this section of Chapter 42 as: The Dao is independent and without match, this chaotic undifferentiated mixture unified as one body produces ("twoness is generated from oneness,"), the heavens and earth generate the *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] of yin and yang ("threeness is generated from twoness"), and the interactions of yin and yang's respective *qi*s 气 [energy, vital energy, material] form various new things ("all things are generated from threeness").

Various pre-Qin factions of Daoism continued the discussion of cosmogony given here in Chapter 42, some of the more important ones are the following:

First, in the *Tian di* 天地 [*The Heavens and Earth*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we find "In the great beginning there was non-presence (无), without presence (有) and without name. Oneness then arose, there was oneness but still no form, depending on it, things thereby were generated. This is called *de* 德. The formless was differentiated, but without space. This is called *ming* 命. Movement continued and things were generated, things generated patterns (理), and this is called form." Here "non-presence (无)" is used to explain the Dao. "Oneness but still no form" obviously has "oneness" representing

the formless Dao. The formless "oneness" begins to "have differentiation", however, the *Tian di* 天地 [*The Heavens and Earth*] chapter does not tell us what "differentiation" means. According to the explanation of later scholars, it is "differentiating yin and yang" (see Xuan Ying's 宣颖 (Qing Dynasty) *Nan hua jing jie* 南华经解 [*Explanation of the Zhuangzi*]. This type of interpretation is also evidenced by what we find in the *Tian zi fang* 田子方 [*Tian Zifang*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*].

Second, in the *Tian zi fang* 田子方 [*Tian Zifang*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we find: "The utmost yin is cold and quiet, the utmost yang is hot and flourishing. Cold and quiet comes from the heavens, hot and flourishing comes from the earth. The two interact and harmoniously unite and there is the generation of things." This idea clearly continues the thought we have here in Chapter 42 of the *Laozi*. Here the idea is that yang *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] comes from the heavens, and yin *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] comes from the earth, these two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] (i.e. "twoness") "two interact and harmoniously unite", which correspond with what Laozi says, "surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] forms a harmony", things are transformed and generated under these conditions.

Third, the Mawangdui *Huangdi Sijing* 黄帝四经 [*The Yellow Emperor's Four Classics*] record: "Assembling and gathering X X X X X X[2] to form a round granary [i.e. accumulation]. Neither bright nor dark, there is no yin or yang. Before yin and yang are determined, I have nothing to name. Then it starts to divide into two, differentiating between yin and yang, and distinguishing between the four [seasons]. (*Guan* 观 [Observation] of the *Shi da jing* 十大经 [*The Ten Great Classics*])" is a theory from the Warring States period Huang-Lao Daoist tradition. The numbers expressed in the process of things being generated are one, two, and four. The *Tian wen* 天文 [*Patterns of The Heavens*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] develops on this theory: "The concentrated essence [of qi] of yin and yang becomes the four seasons, the dispersed/diluted essence [of qi] of the four seasons becomes all things."

Fourth, the *Da yue* 大乐 [*Great Music*] chapter of the *Lü Shi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Annals of Lü Buwei*] records: "From the great oneness two standards come forth, from the two models yin and yang come forth, yin and yang change and transform, one is upper one is lower, united they form patterns (Gao You 高诱 (d. 212) comments: "Patterns (章) is

2 Tr. note: These six characters are unknown.

like form or shape")." "Great oneness" is the Dao. Gao You explains "two models" as the heavens and earth. Yin and yang come from the heavens and earth, which is completely consistent with Zhuangzi's explanation. The production of all things is "yin and yang change and transform, one is upper one is lower," they harmoniously unite and form things with form or shape.

2) Everything shoulders yin and embraces yang: Yin is to their backs and face yang to their front.

Lü Jifu 吕吉甫 (d. 1111): "Hidden and unmeasurable, that is yin; bright and observable, that is yang. Those generated all have the hidden and unmeasurable yin on their backs and face the bright and observable yang, therefore it is said: Everything shoulders yin and embraces yang. Shoulders means to carry on one's back, and embraces means one is facing it."

3) Surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] forms a harmony: Yin and yang, these two *qi* 气 [energy, material], mutually surge into one another and come into a balanced blended harmonious state.

"Surging (冲)" is the intersecting surge and swash. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: "Surging (冲) means surge and swing (涌摇)."

"Surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]" indicates the surging and swashing of yin and yang, the two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]. Many explanations read "surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]" as "empty *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]." Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) argues that this explanation does not work. He writes, "In Chapter 4 we have: 'The Dao is *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, empty[3]], but use it [and it] *huo* 或 [perhaps] might not *ying* 盈 [fill up, full].' Here the character '*chong* 冲 [surging, swash, empty]' is treated as '*zhong* 盅 [a handless small cup],' whereas in this chapter the character '*chong* 冲 [surging, swash, empty[4]]' is used just as itself. The *Shuowen* 说文 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: 'A small handless cup (盅), is an empty vessel.' It further records: 'Surging (冲) means surge and swing (涌摇).' The meaning of these two words is different. The Dao's fullness is empty and thus the metaphor of a vessel, or 'a small handless cup (盅)' is used [for interpreting the character 冲]. The essence of *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] of yin and yang swishes and surges

3 Tr. note: The meaning "empty" is very specific to this context.

4 Tr. note: The meaning "empty" is very specific to this context.

into a harmony, and thus the word 'surge' is used. This is the difference [between the two places where the same character 冲 was used]."

"Harmony (和)" can be understood in two ways. First, it describes yin and yang uniting harmoniously in a balanced blended harmonious state. For example, the *Tian zi fang* 田子方 [*Tian Zifang*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] states: "The utmost yin is cold and quiet, the utmost yang is hot and flourishing, cold and quiet comes from the heavens, hot and flourishing comes from the earth, the two interact and harmoniously unite and there is the generation of things." In the chapter *Tian wen* 天文 [*Patterns of The heavens*], the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] records, "The Dao begins in oneness. Oneness does not generate [things], and thus it divides into yin and yang. Yin and yang harmoniously combine and all things are generated." According to this understanding, "surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] forms a harmony" should be indicating a state in which yin and yang harmoniously unite. Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) thus writes, "'Harmony (和)' indicates the fitting equality of yin and yang where neither is partial towards overcoming the other." A second way to understand what is being said here is as indicating something outside of yin and yang, that there is another kind of *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material], called 'harmonious (和) *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]'. Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) writes: "'Surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] forms a harmony' means that yin and yang, the two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] swish and swash, interacting to form 'harmonious (和) *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]'."

Contemporary Translation

The Dao is independent and without match, the chaotic undifferentiated mixture unified as one body produces the heavens and earth, the heavens and earth produce yin and yang, the two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material], these two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] interact with one another and form various types of new things. All things shoulder yin and face yang, the two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] yin and yang come together swishing and swashing to form new harmonious bodies.

{People hate [to be] "the orphan", "the widower", and "the unworthy", and yet kings and rulers actually use these terms to refer to themselves. It is true of all things and affairs that sometimes they are lessened, and thereby gain, sometimes they gain and are thereby lessened. What others use to instruct me,

I also use to instruct others. Those who are violent do not meet nice deaths. I take this as the ground for my teaching.

Argument

This chapter is Laozi's cosmogony. Here "oneness," "twoness" and "threeness" indicate the process by which the Dao formed all things. The Dao which [Chapter 14 describes as] "they are muddled and one (混而为一)" is, for the miscellaneous phenomena, independent and matchless, absolutely without parallel and dependence. Laozi uses "oneness" to describe the undifferentiated state of the Dao as it moves into the first level of concreteness. The mixed and undifferentiated Dao actually already constitutes the two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] of yin and yang. The *Yi zhuan* 易传 [*Book of Changes*] says that once yin and once yang is called "the Dao". "Twoness" indicates that the Dao contains yin and yang, and these two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] constitute the most basic elements (原质) of all things. As the Dao continues to become concrete and differentiated, the interaction of yin and yang also gets more and more frequent. "Threeness" shows how yin and yang, these two *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material], mutually surge into one another and come into a balanced blended harmonious state. Every new harmonious body is produced from this type of state.

This chapter is broken into two paragraphs. The second paragraph states, "What people hate [to be], is the orphan, the widower, the unworthy, and kings and rulers take them as their names. Thus things are sometimes diminished as they are benefited, or are benefitted as they are diminished. What people teach I also teach. The overly bold do not get their [timely] death, I use them as fathers of teaching." Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang), in his *Laozi jiao gu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*], suspects that "the first and second paragraphs here do not seem to connect." Gao Heng, Cheng Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944), Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999), and many others suspect that the second paragraph was [mistakenly] relocated here from Chapter 39. Note: The lines began with "what people hate" are to remind people not to be conceited or vain, but rather be modest and self-observant. Judging by its meaning, this paragraph seems to be mistakenly relocated to this chapter from Chapter 39.

Forty-Three

天下之至柔，馳騁 (1) 天下之至堅。無有入無間 (2)，吾是以知無為之有益。
不言之教，無為之益，天下希 (3) 及之。

The utmost softness in the world, *chi cheng* 驰骋 [gallop, expatiate] (1) the utmost hardness in the world. *Wu you* 无有 [emptiness-having, non-presence-presence] entering *wu jian* 无间 [no space, very close] (2), by this I know that non-action (无为) has benefit.

Teaching that has no speech, the benefit of non-action (无为), in the world *xi* 希 [rare, sparse] (3) reach it.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Chi cheng* 驰骋 [gallop, expatiate]: Describes the way horses run. Here we can also read it as "steer" or "manage."
2) *Wu you* 无有 [emptiness-having, non-presence-presence] entering *wu jian* 无间 [no space, very close]: The formless power is able to penetrate through things with no gaps.

   "*Wu you* 无有 [emptiness-having, non-presence-presence]" is "That-which-is-without form."[1] "*Wu jian* 无间 [no space, very close]" means having no gaps. In the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] "*wu you* 无有 [emptiness-having, non-presence-presence] *ru* 入 [enter, join] *wu jian* 无间 [no space, very close]" is written as "coming from '*wu you* 无有 [emptiness-having, non-presence-presence]' and entering *wu jian* 无间 [no space, very close]."
3) *Xi* 希 [rare, sparse]: In Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version this is "*xi* 稀 [scattered, rare]."

1 Tr. note: This hyphenated definition is given in English in the original.

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Contemporary Translation

The softest things in the world can steer the hardest things in the world. The power of that-which-is-without form can go through that which has no gaps, and I therefore know the benefits of non-action.

Very few in the world can teach without speech and benefit from non-action.

Argument

Water is the softest thing, it goes through the mountains and the earth. Laozi uses water as a metaphor for the fact that softness can overcome hardness. "Purposive action" is an expression of the hard and strong, which should be alerted and restrained for the ruler. This chapter emphasizes the function of the "soft and weak" and effects of "non-action."

Forty-Four

名與身孰親？身與貨孰多 (1)？得與亡 (2) 孰病？
甚愛必大費 (3)；多藏必厚亡 (4)。
故知足不辱 (5)，知止不殆，可以長久。

Reputation or body, which is closer? Body or property, which is *duo* 多 [more, heavy] (1)? Receiving or losing (2), which is more harmful?

Great love must entail a great cost (3); much storing must lead to heavy loss (4).

Therefore, knowing what is enough there won't be disgrace (5), knowing when to stop there won't be danger, and there can be long permanence.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Duo* 多 [more, heavy]: Means *chong* 重 [repeated, layers].

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939): "The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: '*duo* 多 [more, heavy] means *chong* 重 [repeated, layers].' It can be taken as the *chong* 重 [repeated, layers] from 'overlapping' (重叠) or, through extension, we can take it as *zhong* 重 [heavy, lay stress on] from 'light or heavy [valueless or valuable]' (轻重). The *Hanshu* 汉书 [*Book of Han*] records: 'also value/attach importance to his talents'. Shi Gu 师古 (d. 645) comments '*duo* 多 [more, heavy] means *chong* 重 [repeated, layers].'"

2) Receiving or losing: "Receiving" refers to gaining reputation. "Losing" refers to losing one's life.

3) Great love must entail a great cost: This means that overly loving reputation will necessarily lead to paying a great cost. In the received version "great love must entail a great cost" is preceded by the words "therefore," but the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version omits these words.

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "Jing Fu's (892–893) *Daodejing bei* 道德经碑 [*Stone Tablet Inscription of the Daodejing*], Heshang Gong's (1st century CE; dates unknown) *Daode zhen jing zhu* 道德真经注 [*Commentary to the Genuine Daodejing*], Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) *Daode zhen jing zhushu* 道德真经注疏 [*Commentary and Notes to the Genuine Daodejing*], Li Rong's 李荣 (1933–) *Daode zhen jing yijie* 道德真经义解 [*Explanation*

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of the Meaning of the Genuine Daodejing], and Cheng Dachang's 程大昌 (d. 1195) *Yi lao tongyan* 易老通言 [*Comprehensive Paraphrase of the Book of Changes and the Laozi*] all follow this example. The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version is similar as well, only leaving the *shen* 甚 [great, extreme] in the beginning and *wang* 亡 [loss, die] at the end. The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version is completely damaged and smeared."

4) Much storing must lead to heavy loss: Rich and lavish possessions must necessarily incur disastrous loss.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "For instance, [the King Zhou of Shang] collected valuables in the world in order to satisfy the desire for an extremely lavish life at Lutai palace,[1] [soon] the world abandoned/betrayed him and the palace was emptied. This is [what is meant by] the collection is great, but one does not know that the loss is great [too]."

5) Therefore, knowing what is enough, there won't be disgrace: The *gu* 故 [therefore, thereby] is missing in the received version. According to the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version it is added here.

Contemporary Translation

Which is closer [to you] in comparison with one another, reputation or life? Which is more valuable [to you] in comparison with one another, life or possessions? Which is more harmful, getting reputation and profit or losing one's life?

Overly loving reputation will necessarily lead to expending a lot; gathering too many possessions will necessarily lead to grievous losses.

Therefore, knowing satisfaction one will not suffer humiliation or disgrace, knowing when it is appropriate and acceptable to stop, then danger will not follow, and this way can be maintained for a long time.

1 Tr. note: Lutai is the palace of one of the most infamous kings in the Chinese history, King Zhou of Shang. He collected money and demanded labor from the people in order to build the grand palace named Lutai so that he and his favorite concubine could lead an extremely lavish life. He was later overthrown by King Wu of Zhou.

Argument

Most people take their body [and life] lightly, and submit to [taking too seriously] reputation and profit, selfishly obtaining them without concern for dangers and loss. Laozi thereby reminds ordinary people to treat their lives as precious, and not to struggle with little concern for their bodies [and lives] for reputation and profit. "Great love must entail a great cost; much storing must lead to a heavy loss." There is much truth in this sentence. Looking around, we can see people everywhere in society playing tricks and being shifty in the arena of acquisition and competition, what they obtain and miss, preserve and lose is actually quite obvious.

Forty-Five

大成 (1) 若缺，其用不弊。
大盈若沖 (2)，其用不窮。
大直若屈，大巧若拙 (3)，大辯若訥。
躁勝寒，靜勝熱 (4)。清靜爲天下正

Great completion (1) seems lacking, its use is not *bi* 弊 [harm, disadvantage, to cease, to use up].

Great fullness resembles *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash], its use is not exhausted.

Great straightness seems bent, great skill seems clumsy (3), great argument resembles stammering.

Rashness conquers cold, tranquility conquers heat (4). Tranquil and calm, to align all under heaven (5).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Great completion: The most perfect thing.
2) *Chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash]: Should be glossed as meaning "empty" (虚) here (see note 1 to Chapter 4).
3) Great straightness seems bent, great skill seems clumsy: In the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version, these phrases appear in a different order and do not include the expression "great argument resembles stammering".
4) Rashness conquers cold, tranquility conquers heat: Moving around fast is a way to ward off the cold, remaining tranquil allows one to bear the heat. Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) notes: "'Rashness' refers to swift movements or disturbances which is the opposite to tranquility. 'Rashness' and 'tranquility' refer to different sensations or conditions of the human body within varying circumstances. When the body is active, this gives rise to warmth, which is able to overcome coldness. When the body remains tranquil, it naturally remains cool. Coolness can overcome heat."
5) Tranquil and calm, to align all under heaven: The *Guodian* version reads "清清（静）为天下定": "Cool (tranquil), to make stable all under heaven." Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "'Align' refers

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to what rectifies human beings. Hence, it has the meaning of 'being exemplary'."

Contemporary Translation

What is most perfect seems to lack something, but its functioning cannot be exhausted.

The thing that is most full seems to be empty, but its functioning has no limits.

What is most straight seems bent, what is most skillful seems clumsy, the greatest eloquence resembles stammering.

Motion can ward off the cold, keeping still allows one to bear the heat. By remaining tranquil and not engaging in purposeful action, one can be a model for the people.

Argument

This chapter offers a description of a form of human existence of "great completion" and "great fullness". The phrases which compare this form of existence to one of "lack", "emptiness," "being bent," "clumsiness," and "stammering" are meant to make clear that an ideal personality has nothing to do with outward appearances, but is contained within the recesses of one's inner life.

"Rashness conquers cold, tranquility conquers heat. Tranquil and calm, to align all under heaven": this means that opposites can keep each other in check, and the text ends by singling out tranquility and non-action as having the most sublime function.

Forty-Six

天下有道，卻 (1) 走馬以糞 (2)。天下無道，戎馬 (3) 生於郊 (4)。
咎莫大於欲得，禍莫大於不知足 (5)。故知足之足，常足矣 (6)。

When the world has the Dao, *que* 却 [retreat, return] (1) the riding horses (走马) go to *fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up] (2). When the world does not have the Dao, army horses (3) born on the outskirts (4). There is no greater disaster than desiring to obtain, there is no greater calamity than not knowing satisfaction (5). Therefore, the satisfaction of knowing satisfaction is lasting satisfaction (6).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Que* 却 [retreat, off]: Return, retreat.

   Wu Cheng's 吴澄 (d. 1333): "*Que* 却 [retreat, return] means to return."

2) The horses for riding go to *fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up] (2): "*Fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up]" means to cultivate the land and farm. Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version has "*bo* 播 [sow seeds]" instead of "*fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up]." These two words are interchangeable in classical Chinese.

   Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "This means that when the world has the Dao, the weapons of war are not raised, the riding horses are not used for the army but are used to farm.... In the *Teng wen gong* 滕文公 [*Lord Teng Wen*] chapter of the *Mengzi* 孟子 [*Writings of Master Meng*] we have, 'In bad years there is not even enough for spreading manure on one's fields.' Zhao Qi 赵岐 (d. 201) comments: 'Spreading manure and cultivate one's fields.' The *Yue ling* 月令 [*Proceedings of Government in the Different Months*] chapter of the *Li ji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*] records: 'Manure can be applied to the fields.' *Fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up] also means to cultivate the fields."

3) Army horses: This means warhorses.

4) Born on the outskirts: The literal meaning of the words here is that mares give birth to foals on the outskirts of war zones. Note: "Born (生)" is read as *xing* 兴 [thrive, increase]. It therefore says that there is a huge increase of warhorses just outside the war zones, which means there is a recruitment of soldiers to fight. This is exactly the opposite of what we have in the prior sentence.

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Wu Cheng: "The 'outskirts' is the territory between two states."

The *Wei tong pian* 未通篇 [*Ignorance*] Chapter of the *Yan tie lun* 盐铁论 [*Discourses on Salt and Iron*] records "Farmers used horses to till the fields, and the common folk did not ride or use them to pull carriages. At that time, the riding horses (走马) go to *fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up], but later, when the armies were repeatedly dispatched, war horses became insufficient, so even mares and foals were enlisted, which resulted in colts being born on the battlefields. Because the six domestic animals were neither raised in the homes nor the five grains cultivated in the fields, the common folk did not have enough of even the coarsest food to eat."[1] This is an actual example of "the riding horses (走马) go to *fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up]" and "war horses born on the outskirts."

5) There is no greater disaster than desiring to obtain, there is no greater calamity than not knowing satisfaction: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version reads, "There is no greater calamity than not knowing satisfaction, there is no greater disaster than desiring to obtain." According to the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] the two adjacent sentences are reversed. So there is a difference between the received version and the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* and *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions here. The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* version reads: "There is no greater crime then having desires, there is no greater calamity than not knowing satisfaction, and no more miserable disaster than desiring to obtain." The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version reads, "There is no deeper crime than extreme desires, no more miserable disaster than desiring to obtain, and no greater calamity than not knowing satisfaction." The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version's ordering of clauses is better than others because the third clause, "no greater calamity than not knowing satisfaction," is perfectly related to the following line, namely, "the satisfaction of knowing satisfaction is lasting satisfaction." The two lines form a more integrated meaning.

6) The satisfaction of knowing satisfaction is lasting satisfaction: The type of satisfaction that knows knowing satisfaction is lasting satisfaction.

Hu Jichuang 胡寄窗 (d. 1993): "The concrete embodiment of having few desires is 'knowing satisfaction'. The school [of Daoism] associated with Laozi heavily emphasizes knowing satisfaction, thinking that knowing satisfaction can determine people's social standing, preservation of life, and luck.... Not only that, they also thought that knowing satisfaction could be a subjective standard for evaluating wealth. If one masters

1 *Chinese Just War Ethics: Origin, Development, and Dissent* page 118; translation modified.

knowing satisfaction even though they may be objectively poor, they may still be able to subjectively think of themselves as rich, or as Chapter 33 states, 'one who knows what is enough is rich,' and 'there is no greater wealth than knowing satisfaction.' Because one knows the reason for why (and how) 'satisfaction' satisfies, and thereby can be constantly satisfied. Constant satisfaction can be seen as a type of wealth. In contrast, while someone can be objectively rich, if they do not subjectively know satisfaction and continue to want things, then this can bring about vast disasters. Here we can see that a subjective knowing satisfaction or not knowing satisfaction, and having or not having desires determines Laozi's view on richness. We have a bit of idealism here. However, those [who are part of the school of Daoism associated with Laozi] also emphasize the function of objective influences in producing desires. For example, they say, [quoting Chapter 35], 'Music and delicious food can make a passerby stop in their tracks.' Having few desires and knowing satisfaction cannot be clearly separated. No one can have few desires and not know satisfaction, just as no one can have many desires and also know satisfaction. Laozi proposes having few desires and knowing satisfaction as a way of strongly criticizing the aristocracy and their insatiable desires." (*Zhongguo jingji sixiang shi* 中国经济思想史 [*The History of China's Economic Thought*] page 209.)

Contemporary Translation

When a state's political situation is on the right track, the warhorses can be returned to the farmers and used to plow and farm. When a state's political situation is not on the right track, then the number of army horses are significantly increased on the outskirts so as to initiate wars.

There is no greater disaster than not knowing satisfaction, there is no greater crime than insatiable desire. Therefore, the type of satisfaction that understands how to know satisfaction is everlasting satisfaction.

Argument

Most of the reason that wars are started has to do with the aggressor's vigorous ambition, a greed that does not know rest or satisfaction. The result is invading land, killing people, and bringing unending misery. Laozi points out and describes the rulers' various desires and trouble making, and cautions the

rulers to be tranquil, quiet, and to practice non-action (无为), lessening desires to seize.

"When the world does not have the Dao, army horses born on the outskirts." This might be a reflection of a tragic time that was characterized by military emergencies, intense wars, and mutual killing and invasion. This chapter, along with Chapter 30 and 31, are anti-war. They heavily attack on the wars of aggressions at the time, which brought misery to the common people.

Forty-Seven

不出戶，知天下；不闚牖，見天道 (1)。其出彌遠，其知彌少。
是以聖人不行而知，不見而明 (2)，不為而成 (3)。

Not leaving the door, knowing all under heaven; not looking out the window, seeing the Dao of heaven (天道) (1). One goes further away, one understands even less.

For this reason sages do not travel and yet understand, do not see and yet are *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent] (2), do not act (不为) (3) and complete.

Commentary and Explanation

1) The Dao of heaven (天道): Natural (自然) regularities.
2) Do not see and yet are *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]: "*Ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]" is originally written as "*ming* 名 [name, reputation]." "*Ming* 名 [name, reputation]" and "*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]" are interchangeable in classical Chinese. Zhang Sicheng's 张嗣成 (d. 1344) version has "*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]" here.

   Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "Since '*ming* 名 [name, reputation]' and '*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]' are interchangeable in ancient Chinese, the *Laozi*'s [character here] is '*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]' not '*ming* 名 [name, reputation].' Chapter 22 reads, 'not see oneself, thereby clear (不自见，故明).' Chapter 52 reads, 'To see (见) the small is called *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]'; in all these cases *jian* 见 [see, meet, opinion, humble] and '*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]' are used in connection with one another, and this is proof [for reading '*ming* 名 [name, reputation]' here as '*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]']. The character here should be changed according to Zhang Sicheng's version." The line "do not see and yet are *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]" indicates not seeing or looking and yet being "*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]" about the Dao of heaven. The *Yu lao* 喻老 [*Illustration of the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] quotes the *Laozi* as saying, "do not see and yet are *ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent];" accordingly we change "*ming* 名 [name, reputation]" into "*ming* 明 [clear, bright, intelligent]."
3) Do not act (不为): This means non-action (无为).

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Contemporary Translation

Not going outside one's door, one is able to infer the patterns of things (事理) of the world; not looking out one's window, one is able to understand natural (自然) rules. The more one chases after what is external the less they understand about the Dao.

So the sage does not travel but is able to perceive, does not observe but is able to realize, practices non-action and is able to have achievements.

Argument

Laozi particularly emphasizes intuitionistic introspection. He thinks that if our thinking gets carried away with what is external, this will make our thoughts scattered and will mess up our spirit. A frivolous and uneasy mind and spirit naturally has no way to clearly discern things in the external world, which is why Laozi writes, "One goes further away, one understands even less."

Laozi thinks that everything in the world operates in accordance with certain rules or regulations; if one can grasp this rule or regulation (or principle) then one can see through to the actual situation of things and affairs. Laozi thinks that we should—through the effort of self-cultivation—practice introspection and reflection, and clear our minds and spirits from blockages, so as to discern the external things and understand the rules or regulations of their operations, with the help of our self-illuminating wisdom and tranquil state of mind.

The ideas expressed above are not limited to Laozi and Zhuangzi, as Buddhism also supports similar fundamental notions (Laozi's expression of these ideas is not as explicit as Zhuangzi's). Broadly speaking, we can say that Eastern forms of thinking all include, on some fundamental level, an affirmation of these notions. Here we see a salient difference from the notions of Western thinkers and psychoanalysts who think that in the deepest recesses of the human mind and soul there exist anxieties and unease. According to these thinkers, the more people explore the depth of their mind and spirit (心灵), the more they realize that it is [full] of the surging undercurrents, [which are] torrential and restless.

Forty-Eight

為學日益 (1)，為道日損 (2)。損之又損，以至於無為。無為而無不為 (3)。取 (4) 天下常以無事 (5)，及其有事 (6)，不足以取天下。

For learning daily increasing (1), for the Dao daily decreasing (2). Decreasing and decreasing, to the point of non-action. Non-action and thereby nothing is not done (3). *Qu* 取 [get, select] (4) the world always relies on *wu shi* 无事 [no affairs] (5), when it comes to *you shi* 有事 [have affairs] (6) it is not enough for *qu* 取 [get, select] the world.

Commentary and Explication

1) For learning daily increasing: "For learning" means investigating external things as an intellectual activity.

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: "'Learn' is the learning of political institutions, rites, and music; 'daily increasing' speaks to emotions, desires, formality, and hypocrisy, which everyday are more added."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "In 'for learning daily increasing' the important point is that people learn in a very active and assertive manner (有为); the goal is to add to their emotions and desires everyday. When emotions and desires are added to every day, there is more trouble and disruption in the world."

2) For the Dao daily decreasing: "For the Dao" means using meditative thinking or experiential embodiment to comprehend the Dao as the state when things are not differentiated. The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version has "those who hear the Dao daily decrease (闻道者日损)."

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004) writes: "Thinking that advocates decrease originated with Laozi. Laozi was the first person to differentiate between 'decrease' and 'increase' [in this way]."

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990) writes: "'For learning' means striving for knowledge of external things. Knowledge should be accumulated, the more the better, which is why [Laozi writes] 'daily increasing'. 'For the Dao' strives for realizing the Dao through experience. The Dao is ineffable, it cannot be named or defined, so realizing the Dao through experience requires lessening knowledge. Chapter 19 writes

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'observe *su* 素 [simple, plain, white] and embrace *pu* 朴 [simple, plain, unadorned, uncarved wood], be less concerned with yourself and minimize your desires', which is why here we have 'daily decreasing'....

The *Laozi* does not completely reject knowledge, which is why it still wants to use observation to seek understanding of the external world. It thinks that when one is for the Dao they will decrease daily, and when one is for learning they will increase daily, but that which is decreased and increased are not the same. To decrease daily indicates diminishing desires, emotions, and the like; to increase daily indicates accumulating knowledge. These two are not at all contradictory. In my own words, 'for the Dao' means obtaining a type of spiritual horizon, 'for learning' means accumulating knowledge, and these are simply separate. Someone who knows a lot might still have a spiritual realm that resembles a small child—naïve and unaffected. According to the *Laozi*'s own method of expression, a person should know what is increased and protect what decreases." (*Zhongguo zhexue shi xibian* 中国哲学史新编 [*A New History of Chinese Philosophy*].)

Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) writes: "'For learning' indicates intensive study, accumulating over the days and months, knowledge gets broader in its daily increase. 'Hearing the Dao' relies on self-cultivation, it requires calm observation and deep contemplation[1] ... and returning to what is simple and honest."

3) Non-action and thereby nothing is not done: No absurd or reckless actions means that nothing cannot be accomplished.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) writes: "If those in higher positions practice non-action, then the people will correct themselves, and each will be at ease in their own business, therefore 'nothing is not done.' 'Non-action' speaks to their intentions and motivations, 'nothing not done' speaks to their results."

4) *Qu* 取 [get, select]: Here it means do or act (为), or order (治), and is like "to control and transform" (摄化).

Heshang Gong comments: "*Qu* 取 [get, select] means to order (治)."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) writes: "The *Shigu* 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*] section of the *Guang ya* 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*] records: '*Qu* 取 [get, select] means do or act (为).' The twenty-fourth section of the *Guoyu* 国语 [*Discourses of the States*] records: 'This illness cannot be *wei* 为.' Wei [Zhao] 韦 [昭] (d. 273) explains: '*Wei* 为 [do, act, for] means

1 Tr. note: Gao Ming's words "calm observation and deep contemplation 静观玄览" refer to the idea of "cleansing the dark mirror (涤除玄览)" in Chapter 10.

zhi 治 [to order, regulate, cure] here.' This shows that *qu* 取 means *wei* 为 [do, act, for], and that the latter has the same sense as *zhi* 治 [to order, regulate, cure]. This is why Heshang Gong comments: '*Qu* 取 [get, select] means to order (治)."

5) *Wu shi* 无事 [no affairs]: This means no confusion or tumultuous affairs.
6) *You shi* 有事 [have affairs]: Governmental regulations and acts are numerous as well as harsh. Here *shi* 事 [affairs] is related to the "*shi* 事 [affairs]" in the phrase "to unnecessary incur trouble or be meddlesome (惹事生非)."

Contemporary Translation

Seeking to study one gains (knowledge and experience) day by day, seeking the Dao one loses (ingenuity) from one day to the next. Lessening and lessening until one reaches the realm of "non-action."

If one can practice non-action, then there is nothing they cannot accomplish. Ordering a state requires lasting tranquility and preventing tumultuous affairs. If one let the governmental regulations and acts numerous as well as harsh, one does not deserve to govern a state.

Argument

"For learning" means seeking external experiential knowledge, which can be accumulated and gained. "For the Dao" means renouncing stubbornness and subjective opinions, opening one's heart and mind to a wider vision, comprehending the root of things and affairs, and bringing it up to the level of one's subjective spiritual horizon (精神境界).

"For the Dao" is a discussion of the root of things and affairs, and bringing them up to the level of a person's spiritual realm. Today's philosophy needs to not only "make learning" but also in particular make "the Dao [the way]."

Forty-Nine

聖人常無心 (1)，以百姓心為心。
善者，吾善之；不善者，吾亦善之；德 (2) 善。
信者，吾信之；不信者，吾亦信之；德信。
聖人在天下，歙歙焉 (3)，為天下渾其心 (4)，百姓皆注其耳目 (5)，聖人皆孩之 (6)。

The sage constantly has no heart-mind (常无心) (1), but takes the heart-mind of the people as heart-mind.

Shan 善 [goodness, nice, niceness] people, I am *shan* 善 [goodness, nice, niceness] to them; not nice people, I am also nice to them; *de* 德 [obtain, virtuosity] *shan* 善 [goodness, nice, niceness] (2).

Xin 信 [to trust, trust, trustworthy] people, I *xin* 信 [to trust, trust, trustworthy] them; not trustworthy people, I also trust them, *de* 德 [obtain, virtuosity] *xin* 信 [to trust, trust, trustworthy].

Sage in the world, *xi xi* 歙歙 [refrain, inhale] *yan* 焉 [how, herein; also used, as here, to end a phrase] (3), with the world merging his heart-mind (4), the people will all concentrate on their ears and eyes (5) the sage takes them all as children[1] (6).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Constantly has no heart-mind: The received version has "without a constant heart-mind (无常心)." This part has been changed according to the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version.

Wang Anshi 王安石 (d. 1086): "The sages have no heart-mind … because 'they share in the good or ill luck of the people'."

Zhang Chunyi 张纯一 (d. 1955): "In the Jing Long era stele version and in Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) version the word 'constant (常)' does not appear, but the text should be read 'the sage constantly has no heart-mind'." (*Laozi tong shi* 老子通释 [*Explications of the Laozi*].)

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): "Zhang Chunyi writes that 'the text should be read "the sage constantly has no heart-mind".' What Zhang says is correct. Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown)

1 Tr. note: A more literal translation could read "the sage babysits (孩) them."

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comments: 'Sages place importance on change, and value continuing patterns, they thereby seem to "have no heart-mind".' Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) writes: 'The heart-mind of "having no heart-mind" is the master of the heart-mind.' Liu Jinxi 刘进喜 writes: 'The sage "has no heart-mind;" when it is moved, it then responds.' Li Rong 李荣 (d. 683) comments: 'The sage "has no heart-mind" and unites his virtuosity with that of heaven and earth.' Wang Anshi writes: 'The sage "has no heart-mind," therefore, is without thoughts and practices non-action.' Wang Pang's 王雱 (d. 1076) comments to Chapter 2 read: 'The sage "has no heart-mind," but takes the heart-mind of the people as his heart-mind.' He is quoting from this chapter. Hence, both the father and the son from Linchuan [Wang Anshi and Wang Pang] wrote 'no heart-mind.' I suspect the ancient version would have it as 'no heart-mind'.... Additionally, neither Gu Huan's nor the Jing Long era stele version include the word 'constant (常)', but only have 'no heart-mind'." With new evidence from the *Mawangdui* version, what Yan says is correct. Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998) writes, "'Permanently without heart-mind (恒无心).' Heshang Gong's, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639), Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249), Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown), and many versions since the Tang and Song dynasties almost all mistakenly recorded it as 'no constant heart-mind', so consequently there was a lot written on 'constant heart-mind (常心)'. Jiao Hong 焦竑 (d. 1620), in his *Laozi yi* 老子翼 [*The Wing of the Laozi*], writes: 'Without a constant heart-mind, the heart-mind has no master.'.... Only the Jing Long era stele version, the *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*], and Gu Huan's versions do not have 'constant (常)' or 'permanent (恒),' the sentence simply being 'the sages have no heart-mind, they take the heart-mind of the people as their heart-mind.' This proves that 'constant heart-mind (常心)' is not an exclusive vocabulary employed by Laozi. For this sentence, it is better to follow the *Mawangdui* version which is recorded as 'permanently without heart-mind (恒无心),' or to be consistent with the received version which has 'constantly without heart-mind.' Having no heart-mind means lacking a selfish (私) heart-mind."

2) *De* 德 [obtain, virtuosity]: It is used here for "*de* 得 [obtain, get]".

Using "*de* 德 [obtain, virtuosity]" for "*de* 得 [obtain, get]": The Jing Long era stele version, the *Dunhuang* version, Fu Yi's, Ming Taizu's 明太祖 (also known as Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋) (d. 1398), Lu Xisheng's 陆希声, Sima Guang's 司马光 (d. 1086), Yan Zun's, the *Daode zhenjing ci jie* 道德真经次解 (*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*), Zhang Sicheng's 张嗣成 (d. 1344), Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271), Wu Cheng's 吴澄

(d. 1333), and Wang Pang's versions have the "*de* 德 [obtain, virtuosity]" in "*de* 德 [obtain, virtuosity] *shan* 善 [goodness, nice, niceness]" and "*de* 德 [obtain, virtuosity] *xin* 信 [to trust, trust, trustworthy]" as "*de* 得 [obtain, get]".

3) Sage in the world, *xi xi* 歙歙 [refrain, inhale] *yan* 焉 [how, herein; also used, as here, to end a phrase]: "*Xi* 歙 [refrain, inhale]" means weaken or restrain. Here it means weakening one's subjective intentions. The [auxiliary] word "*yan* 焉 [how, herein; used to end a phrase]" is missing in the received version, but Fu Yi's, Sima Guang's, Li Yue's 李约 (d. 810), Wu Cheng's, and Fan Yingyuan's versions have the word "*yan* 焉 [how, herein; used to end a phrase]." Wang Bi comments: "Therefore the sage is '*xi xi* 歙歙 [refrain, inhale] *yan* 焉 [how, herein; used to end a phrase]' towards the world, and the heart-mind has no master." According to the comments on "*xi xi* 歙歙 [refrain, inhale]" there should be the word "*yan* 焉 [how, herein; used to end a phrase]" after it. So based on the Fu Yi version and the *Mawangdui* version, it is added here.

   Fan Yingyuan: "*Xi* 歙 [refrain, inhale]: is pronounced the same as *xi* 吸 [inhale], and means weaken or restrain."

   Liu Shipei 刘师培 (d. 1919): "'*Xi* 歙 [refrain, inhale]' means close and rest. That is to say, when sages govern/order the world, the way of governance/ordering does not value extravagance."

   Xu Fuguan 徐复观 (d. 1982): "*Xi xi* 歙歙 [refrain, inhale], describes that when ordering the world, one must do their best to get rid of their own intentions, and not allow them to extend and become the master [of their thoughts, feelings, or actions]. This is like breathing in." (*Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中国人性论史 [*On the History of Human Nature in China*].)

4) Merging his heart-mind: Transforming one's thoughts and mood to return to what is simple.

5) The people will all concentrate on their ears and eyes: The people all concentrate on their own ears and eyes. This indicates that the people compete with their knowledge. Wang Bi comments: "Each uses their sharp ears and clear minds." When "each uses their sharp ears and clear minds" then, naturally, there will be all types of strife.

   Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "The people will all concentrate on their ears and eyes is to say looking with fixed eyes and listening attentively, so as to obverse the clear [criteria/standards] for right and wrong."

6) The sage takes them all as children: The sage will treat them as children.

Contemporary Translation

Sages have no subjective prejudices, they take the people's heart-minds as their own.

Nice people, I treat them nice; mean people, I treat them nice as well; in this way everyone can be made to become nice.[2]

Those who can be trusted, I trust; those who cannot be trusted, I trust as well; in this way everyone can be made to be trusting.

When the sage is in his position, restraining his own subjective prejudices and intentions, making people's thoughts and moods return to what is simple and honest, citizens will pay attention to their own eyes and ears, the sage will treat them as children.

Argument

The ideal ruler restrains their own prejudices and intentions and does not take their own subjective rules and regulations as standards for right and wrong, or good and bad. Breaking through self-centeredness, the ideal ruler is able to realize the needs of the people, and open communication with mutual misunderstanding

The ideal ruler merges with the great genuine simplicity and treats everyone (whether they are nice or not) with a nice heart-mind and is honest in their treatment of all people (whether they are trustworthy or not). This is consistent with the humanitarian spirit we find in Chapter 27, where we have "there is no one deserted (无弃人)" and "there is nothing abandoned (无弃物)."

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2 Tr. note: Chen Guying writes "*ren ren xiang shan* 人人向善," "*xiang* 向" connotes "facing" or "moving towards" in this context, thus I use "becom*ing* nice."

Fifty

出生入死 (1)。生之徒 (2)，十有三 (3)；死之徒 (4)，十有三；人之生〔生〕，動之於死地 (5)，亦十有三。夫何故？以其生生之厚 (6)。
蓋聞善攝生 (7) 者，陸行不遇兕 (8) 虎，入軍不被甲兵 (9)；兕無所投其角，虎無所用其爪，兵無所容其刃。夫何故？以其無死地 (10)。

Going [out into] life and entering into death (1). The *tu* 徒 [follower, apprentice] of life (2), of ten there are three (3), the *tu* 徒 [follower, apprentice] of death (4), of ten there are three; those human beings living (life), moving around on the place of death (5), of ten there are also three. Why is this so? Because of *hou* 厚 [thick, rich, generous, to favor] of living life (6).

Now it is heard that those who are adept at *she* 摄 [to grasp, hold onto] life (7), walking the land they do not encounter *si* 兕 [rhinoceros, bull] (8) or tigers, when they join troops they *bei* 被 [suffer from] neither armor nor weapons (9); the *si* 兕 [rhinoceros, bull] has nowhere to sink its horns, the tiger has nowhere to use its claws, the weapons have nowhere to use/allow their blades. Why is this so? Because they have no place of death (10).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Going [out into] life and entering into death: When human beings are born [into the world], there is life. When they enter the ground, this is death. There are two common interpretations of this sentence. According to the first reading, it means that when people abandon the way of life, they set course on the path of death. Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) notes: "[出生入死 means] going out of the place of life and entering into the place of death." According to the second reading, it means that human existence starts with birth and ends in death. Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) comments: "'Going out' means being born, 'entering into' means dying. The former refers to coming into presence out of non-presence, the latter to returning to non-presence from presence." Or as Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "This means that when human beings come into this world, they are alive, and that when they enter the ground, they have died." In my contemporary rendition, I have followed the second line of interpretation.

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2) The *tu* 徒 [follower, apprentice] of life: Those people who have a long life. *Tu* 徒 means "type" or "category" here.

Wang Bi: "Those who chose the way of life bring life to the utmost completion."

Wu Cheng: "All those who do not shorten their lifespan by troubling themselves with worries and concerns, indulgences and desires, do not grow ill because of the influences of wind and cold or heat and dampness, and can keep far away from the misfortunes of punishment, reproach, warfare, and natural disasters; these are the followers of life."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "The type of person who enjoys longevity." (*Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*])

3) Of ten there are three: Three out of ten, or three tenths. Many interpreters follow the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] in reading this phrase as referring to the four limbs and the nine orifices of the human body,[1] which is wrong.

Wang Bi notes: "Of ten there are three means three tenths."

Sima Guang 司马光 (d. 1086): "Approximately three out of ten are gentle and pliable enough to preserve life, three out of ten are firm and strong and thus speed to their death. Another three out of ten fail to avoid hurrying toward death even though their minds are set upon cherishing life. The reason why they hurry toward death while cherishing life is that they are too comfortably served and fed." (*Daode zhenjing lun* 道德真经论 [*On the Authentic Daodejing*])

Yang Xingshun 杨兴顺 (d. 1987): "The mutual interdependence between life and death is one of the natural laws of the 'Dao'. In Laozi's opinion, one third of all people in society incline toward letting life flourish naturally, one third are headed for a natural death, and another one third has turned its back on natural spontaneity, that is to say, on the lawfulness of what is self-so. They make efforts to reach what is unattainable and thus meet their end prematurely."

4) The *tu* 徒 [follower, apprentice] of death: Those who die prematurely.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "The type of person with a short lifespan."

Gao Yandi 高延第 (d. 1886): "'Followers of death' refers to people who are ungenerously treated/discriminated by heaven and die prematurely

1 Tr. note: The *Hanfeizi* and the *Heshang Gong zhu* 河上公注 [*Heshang Gong Commentary*] (as well as others) understand "*shi you san* (十有三)" as ten and three more, instead of three out of ten. Thus, its interpretation—"the four limbs and the nine orifices"—refers to the number thirteen.

halfway through life." (*Laozi zhengyi* 老子证义 [*Evidenced Interpretation of the Laozi*])

5) Those human beings living (life), moving around on the place of death: The Wang Bi version reads "human life" (人之生) instead of "those human beings living life" (人之生生). Amended on the basis of the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) and Mawangdui versions. The phrase *sheng sheng* 生生 is a verb-object construction. Translated into today's language, it means something like being excessively preoccupied with keeping healthy (in Gao Ming's interpretation). Since in the above "the followers of life" and the "followers of death" respectively refers to a person's natural propensity to live long or die prematurely, the word "to move" in the phrase "moving around on the place of death" refers to human actions which run contrary to what is natural, to rash actions. The nine tenths of people described here are not included in what is called "those adapt at grasping life" further on in the text. Only one tenth of all people refrain from taking rash actions, rely on what is self-so, and take care to cultivate both mind and body in treating the "spiritual and the physical as one" (营魄合一 [see Chapter 10]).

   Gao Yandi: "The idea of going to one's death through movement refers to persons with a rich natural endowment who are able to live long lives, but do not take care to preserve themselves and stumble onto the place of death of their own accord."

6) *Hou* 厚 [thick, rich, generous, to favor] of their living life: To devote a lot of care and attention to oneself in the pursuit of life.

   Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "Those who are rich in living life and surrender themselves to sensual pleasures and the like bring harm to their own lives and transport it to a place of death."

   Gao Yandi: "'*Hou* 厚 [thick, rich, generous, to favor] of their living life' refers to people of wealth and standing who devote an excessive amount of attention to themselves and take all sorts of elixirs to prolong their lives. It is precisely because of this that they stumble onto the place of death. The expression refers to the most extreme form of what the text calls 'moving onto a place of death.' Because people are only aware of how injuries can damage life and look upon devoting a lot of attention to themselves as a way of nourishing life, without realizing that both of these attitudes come down to choosing death, so the text makes such a claim here."

7) *She* 摄 [to grasp, hold onto] life: Nourishing life. *She* 摄 [to grasp, hold onto] means "nursing back to health" (调摄) and "nurturing".

8) *Si* 兕 [rhinoceros, bull]: Rhinoceros.

9) When they join troops they carry neither armor nor weapons: They will not be wounded in battle.

Ma Zong 马总 (d. 823) notes: "This means being adverse to warfare and killing."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "In the second part of the *Shigu* 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*] section of the *Guangya* 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*] we read: '*Bei* 被 means to be imposed on (加).' The words 'to encounter' and 'to be imposed on' are both passive verbs. [...] When they join an army, they do not need to proceed beyond enemy lines, therefore, they will never be harmed by weaponry."

10) They have no place of death: They have not entered the realm of death.

Contemporary Translation

When human beings are born into this world, this is life. When they sink beneath the ground, this is death. One third of them will have a long life, one third will pass away early, and yet another one third will follow the road to ruin because of the excessive amount of care and attention they devote to themselves and the rash actions they take. Why is that? Because of their excessive devotion to themselves.

I have heard that those who are skilled at preserving life are unlikely to encounter rhinoceroses and tigers when they walk upon the land and that they will not be harmed in battle. The rhinoceros has no use for its horn. The tiger has no use for its claws. Weapons of war have no use for their sharpness. Why is that so? Because such a person has not entered the bounds of death.

Argument

About a third of all people born into this world live to see old age and another one third will die young. In both cases we are dealing with a natural form of death. Another one third of all people however are born endowed with all it takes to live a long life, but bring harm to their bodies through their insatiable desires and fondness for achievement and thus waste their own lives. Only a very small minority of people (one out of ten) excel at preserving their own life and are capable of leading a quiet and simple existence of pure natural spontaneity by reducing their selfish desires.

Fifty-One

道生之，德畜之，物形之，勢成之 (1)。
是以萬物莫不尊道而貴德。
道之尊，德之貴，夫莫之命而常自然 (2)。
故道生之，德畜之；長之育之；亭之毒之 (3)；養之覆之。生而不有，爲而不恃，長而不宰，是謂“玄德” (4)。

The Dao generates them, virtuosity (德) nourishes them, things give shape to them, *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] brings them to completion (1).

This is why none of the myriad things do not revere the Dao and value virtuosity.

The Dao is revered as such, and virtuosity is valued as such, as [they] command nothing and always are self-so (2).

Therefore the Dao generates them, virtuosity (德) nourishes them; lets them grow and feeds them; makes them *ting* 亭 [kiosk, stabilize] and *du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster] (3), nurtures them and shields them. [Generating and fostering them. Generating without possessing. Acting without relying. Growing without dominating. These are called the *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power] (4).

Commentary and Explanation

1) The Dao generates them, virtuosity nourishes them, things give shape to them, *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] brings them to completion: The Dao is the ultimate cause behind the generation of all things, virtuosity is the cause behind the emergence of one particular entity (according to Zhang Dainian's 张岱年 (d. 2004) *Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*Outline of Chinese Philosophy*]). There are several possible interpretations of the term *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency]. Firstly, as meaning “environment.” Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) for example writes: “This term refers to the environment in which different things dwell, for example to variations in the terrain, to climatic differences, or the distinction between land and sea.” Secondly, as meaning force or power (力). As Chen Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944) notes: “*Shi*

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势 [appearance, situation, tendency] means force." However, what Chen failed to make clear was whether force in this context refers to a form of potency contained within things themselves or to an external natural force. If it refers to a natural force, (as Heshang Gong 河上公 [1st century CE; dates unknown] suggests: "These are the powers of cold and heat." Or as Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) writes in his commentary: "*Shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] refers to something overwhelming. For example how the *qi* 气 [vital energy, material] of spring dominates all things and forces them to come out and to grow, whereas the *qi* 气 [vital energy, material] of autumn dominates them and forces them into maturation."), then this interpretation is similar to the first, since the influence exerted by natural forces such as a hot or cold climate are environmental factors. As such, within this second line of interpretation, the term *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] should be taken as referring to an inner potency. Thirdly, it can be taken as meaning "opposition." Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) for example writes: "Where there is force (势), there is opposition. That is why the text says that *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] brings to completion. The pairing of yin and yang, the alternation of the four seasons, all of this comes about through oppositional forces." Or as Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) remarks: "'This' and 'that' support and make use of each other, opposite forces are interdependent. That is why the text talks about *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] bringing things to completion." In my own translation, I have followed the first line of interpretation presented above.

Zhang Dainian: "Laozi says: 'the Dao generates them, virtuosity nourishes them, things give shape to them, and the environment brings them to completion.' This means that a thing is generated by the Dao, nourished by virtuosity, shaped by things already in place, and molded by situations in the environment. The Dao and virtuosity are the essential foundation for the occurrence and development of any given entity. In the chapter *Tian di* 天地 [*Heaven and Earth*] of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we read: 'That which allows things to come into being is called virtuosity.' Things acquire their virtuosity from the Dao. Virtuosity refers to the particularity, the Dao to the totality. That which a certain thing obtains from the Dao in order to form itself (成其体) is its virtuosity. Virtuosity is actually nothing but the nature (本性) of a particular thing. The Dao and virtuosity are the two most fundamental concepts of Daoist philosophy. This is why Daoism is also called the 'school of the Dao and virtuosity'."

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "Laozi believes there are four stages in the formation and development of all things. Firstly, they are constituted through the Dao and depend on the Dao in order to come into being ('the Dao generates them'). Secondly, after they have come into being, all things acquire their own nature (本性) and rely on this nature (本性) in order to sustain their own existence ('virtuosity nourishes them'). Thirdly, once they have acquired their proper nature, they can only become specific entities if they take on a specific physical form ('things give shape to them'). Fourthly and lastly, the formation and development of things also has to be fostered and restrained by the environment in which they are embedded ('the environment brings them to completion'). Within these four stages, those of the Dao and virtuosity are the most fundamental. Without the Dao, the myriad things would have nowhere to emerge from, and without virtuosity, they would remain without a proper nature. This is why the text says that 'the myriad things all revere the Dao and cherish virtuosity.' However, that the Dao generates the myriad things is naturally and spontaneously so, and the same is the case for the fact that all things rely on the Dao in order to grow and transform. This means that there is no place for a sovereign god who makes them what they are. Therefore, the text adds: '[they] command nothing and always are self-so.'"

We should also note the following: in the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions, the phrase "the environment brings them to completion" reads "instruments (器) bring them to completion." Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) explains: "When things are endowed with shape they can become instruments. Commenting on the phrase 'when uncarved wood is split, it is made into instruments (器)' from Chapter 28 of the *Laozi*, Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) notes: 'Uncarved wood refers to what is genuine. Once what is genuine is split, a hundred types of elements come forth, the different categories are born. These are like instruments (器).' Commenting on the phrase 'all under heaven is a sacred instrument' from Chapter 29, Wang writes: 'An instrument is completed by being united [with something else]. Here it is united with something formless, which is why the text speaks of a sacred instrument.' In the first part of the *Xici* 系辞 [*Appended Remarks*] of the *Yijing* 易经 [*Book of Changes*] it says: 'That which has shape is an instrument.' Han Kangbo 韩康伯 (d. 380) comments: 'A shape that has been brought to completion is called an instrument.' In all these examples the terms 'shape' and 'instrument' share the same meaning and appear together. This makes it clear that the

character *shi* 势 [appearance, situation, tendency] in the received edition [of the *Laozi*] must be a loanword for the character *qi* 器 [instrument]. As such, this passage should be adjusted on the basis of the *Mawangdui* versions to read 'instruments bring them to completion.' This means that things are generated and then nurtured, acquire a form once they are nurtured, and become instruments when they have been fully shaped. That from which they are born is the Dao, what nurtures them is virtuosity, what gives them shape are things, and what brings them to completion are instruments."

2) [They] command nothing and always are self-so: There is no active intervention involved, the myriad things are allowed to follow their own natural course.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "The reason why the Dao is revered and virtuosity is valued is because they do not order around the myriad things or interfere with them, but instead allow them to transform of their own accord and complete themselves."

Zhang Dainian: "The myriad things are all generated by the Dao, but this process of generation is also in itself without any purposive action but spontaneous. That all things abide by the Dao also happens spontaneously. There is no place for God in Laozi's cosmology."

3) Makes them *ting* 亭 [kiosk, stabilize] and *du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster]: There are two interpretations of this phrase. Firstly, by reading the terms in question as referring to "stabilizing" (定) and "making peaceful" (安) respectively. In the *Cangjiepian* 仓颉篇 [*Book of Cangjie*] we read: "*Ting* 亭 [kiosk, stabilize] means to stabilize." The section *Shigu* 释诂 [*Explaining Ancient Words*] in the *Guang ya* 广雅 [*Expanded Erya*] reads: "*Du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster] means peace." As such, this phrase would mean "to stabilize them and to make them peaceful." In a second reading, the words *ting* 亭 [kiosk, stabilize] and *du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster] are interpreted as meaning "to bring to completion" (成) and "to bring to maturation" (熟) respectively. In the *Heshang Gong* and most other ancient editions, these latter terms occur more frequently. Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) notes: "*Ting* 亭 [kiosk, stabilize] should read *cheng* 成 [complete, accomplish], *du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster] should be read as *shu* 熟. These words were used interchangeably because they were homophones." Note: The character *du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster] is a loanword for *chou* 恸 [grieved, pained]. In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] it says: "C*hou* 恸 [grieved, pained] means a fortification, it refers to a plateau. It is pronounced as the

character 毒 [poison, harm, disaster]." Hence, *chou* 悼 [grieved, pained] is a fortress, which in a derived sense can refer to the act of safeguarding. This phrase means allowing the myriad things to bring peace to their innermost disposition.

Fu Shan 傅山 (d. 1684): "The words *ting* 亭 [kiosk, stabilize] and *du* 毒 [poison, harm, disaster] are of crucial significance. Of these two, the latter is the most adequate and pregnant with meaning. Among others, it denotes something forbidden that cannot be violated, while also referring to making something that suffers hardships more robust." Fu's words can be preserved as one possible interpretation.

4) Generating and fostering them. Generating without possessing. Acting without relying. Growing without dominating. These are called the *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power]: These four phrases recur in Chapter 10.

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) comments: "Because the Dao did not consciously or purposefully create the myriad things, Laozi goes on to add: [Generating and fostering them. Generating without possessing. Acting without relying. Growing without dominating. These are called the *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power] (this passage can also be found in Chapter 10). This means that while the Dao has generated the myriad things, it does not treat them as its own possession or act as the sovereign ruler over them. These propositions make clear that the formation and development of all things is not controlled by a supernatural will and has no predetermined purpose at all. This is a materialist and atheist conception. It not only refutes the idea that God created the world, but also indicates that the Dao is not a spiritual entity."

Contemporary Translation

The Dao gives birth to the myriad things, virtuosity nurtures them. The myriad things all appear in different shapes, the environment allows each thing to mature.

This is why there are none among the myriad things that do not revere the Dao and cherish virtuosity.

The reason why the Dao is revered and virtuosity is cherished is because they do not interfere with things and follow what is self-so.

Therefore the Dao gives birth to the myriad things and virtuosity nurtures them, allowing them to grow and feeding them, bringing peace to their inner

disposition, allowing them to be nourished and to recover. While giving birth to the myriad things, it does not treat them as its own possession. While bringing the myriad things to flourish, it does not count this as its accomplishment. While nurturing the myriad things, it does not act as its sovereign ruler. This is the most profound virtuosity.

Argument

The process through which the myriad things grow and develop is as follows: firstly, they are produced from the Dao; secondly, after having given birth to the myriad things, the Dao remains present inside of them and transforms into the essential nature of each particular thing (when the Dao is differentiated into the myriad things, it functions as "virtuosity"); thirdly, all things develop their own proper existence on the basis of their nature (本性); and fourthly, the influence exerted by the environment allows each thing to grow and mature. That the Dao and virtuosity are revered and cherished is due to the fact that they do not interfere with the activities through which the myriad things grow and develop, but instead allow each thing to transform and complete itself, without restraining or disturbing the things by an external force.

That the myriad things are created by the Dao implies neither consciousness nor purposiveness. That is why the text says: "Giving birth it does not possess, acting/facilitating it does not [later on demand payback] on the basis of [this favor], growing it does not govern." "Giving birth", "facilitating", and "growing" (raising, stimulating, nurturing) all point toward the creativity of the Dao. The expressions "not possessing", "not on", and "not governing" make clear that the Dao does not operate intentionally. The entire creative process of the Dao is entirely spontaneous, while the activities through which each thing grows and develops occur completely freely.

The form of creativity described in this chapter is devoid of any form of possessiveness and provides a description of the spontaneity of the Dao and of every individual thing. Such spontaneity is not only peculiar to the notion of the Dao, but also denotes the fundamental spirit of Laozi's whole philosophy.

Fifty-Two

天下有始 (1)，以為天下母 (2)。既得其母，以知其子 (3)；既知其子，復守其母，沒身不殆。
塞其兌，閉其門 (4)，終身不勤 (5)。開其兌，濟其事 (6)，終身不救。見小曰明 (7)，守柔曰強 (8)。用其光，復歸其明 (9)，無遺身殃 (10)；是為襲常 (11)。

The world has a *shi* 始 [beginning, start, initiate] (1): it is considered the mother of [all in] the world (2). Get to the mother in order to know the sons (3). Return and hold on to the mother, [and] *mo* 没 [submerge, die, destroy] the body is in no danger.

Fill the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], close the(ir) *men* 门 [gate, door] (4), [and] the termination of the body is no *qin* 勤 [industrious, frequently, endeavour] (5). Open the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], aid the(ir) affairs (6), and all life long there is no rescue.

To see the small is called *ming* 明 [bright, clarity] (7). To hold on to the soft is called *qiang* 强 [strong, force] (8). Make use of its *guang* 光 [radiance, bright], return (复归) to its *ming* 明 [bright, clarity] (9), do not abandon the body to calamities (10). This is inheriting constancy.

Commentary and Explication

1) *Shi* 始 [beginning, start, initiate]: Root and beginning (本始), that is, the Dao.

   Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (2004): "Before Laozi, hardly anyone noticed the question of the beginning and end of the universe; Laozi thought that the universe had a beginning, the root of everything" (*Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*Outline of Chinese Philosophy*].)
2) Mother: Root and source, referring to the Dao.
3) Sons: Refers to the myriad things.
4) Fill the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], close the(ir) *men* 门 [gate, door]: To seal off the desiring bodily cavities, to close off the path of desire. Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) says: "*Dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], through it affairs and desires are generated; *men* 门 [gate], through it affairs and desires proceed." Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) says: "According to *Shuo gua* 说卦 in the *Yijing* 易经 [*Book of Changes*], '*dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice] refers to mouth.' The extended meaning of the term is bodily cavities. […] To seal off the cavities (塞兑) and

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to close off the gates (闭门) is to make the people have no knowledge, no desire."[1]

Gao Yandi 高延第 (d. 1886): "*Dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice] means mouth, and mouth is where speaking exits through; *men* 门 [gate, door] is where people go (行) through; to seal off one and to close off the other is not to value excessive speech, not to enact odd behaviour (行)."

5) *Qin* 勤 [industrious, frequently, endeavour]: To toil.

Ma Xulun 马叔伦 (d. 1970): "*Qin* 勤 [industrious, frequently, endeavour] is a loan for *jin* 瘽 [disease], glossed in the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] as *bing* 病 [illness, defect]." Here, the character *qin* 勤 [industrious, frequently, endeavour] is used in its usual sense, connoting hardship and disturbance. There is no need to follow Ma's explanation.

6) Open the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], aid the(ir) affairs: To open the desiring bodily cavities, to multiply messy affairs.

Xi Dong: "Open up the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], and the people wise up; add to the(ir) affairs, and decrees proliferate and the world is brought into burning disorder."

Gao Yandi: "Those who esteem speeches get exhausted; those who act a lot get defeated; [both types] let cheat and forge grow, and [they] cannot benefit anything."

7) To see the small is called *ming* 明 [bright, clarity]: Only the capacity to observe the minute can be called clarity (明).

Chen Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944): "If [one] sees the small, [one] stresses analysis and sees the pattern of the affairs—this is clarity."

8) *Qiang* 强 [strong, force]: Means unremitting, healthy and vigorous.

9) Make use of its *guang* 光 [radiance, bright], return again to its *ming* 明 [bright, clarity]: *Guang* 光 [radiance, bright] is to shine; *ming* 明 [bright, clarity] is to let light in.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "That water can reflect things is called *guang* 光 [radiance, bright]; the substance of *guang* 光 [radiance, bright] is called *ming* 明 [bright, clarity]. [One ought to] channel the external *guang* 光 [radiance, bright] to shed light on the internal, return to and preserve the inner brightness."

10) Do not abandon the body to calamities: Not to bring disaster upon oneself.

11) Inheriting constancy: To inherit the constant Dao. The received text reads *xi* 习 [to practice, habit] instead of *xi* 袭 [to inherit]. The Fu Yi

1 "Make the people have no knowledge, no desire" is from Chapter 3 of the *Laozi*.

傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Su Zhe 苏辙 (d. 1112) version, the Lin Xiyi 林锡逸 (d. 1271) version, the Wu Cheng version, the Jiao Hong 焦竑 (d. 1620) version and the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version all read *xi* 袭 [to inherit].

Ma Xulun: "*Xi* 习 [to practice, habit] and *xi* 袭 [to inherit] used to be interchangeable. The commentary on the entry '*Xu shi* 胥师 [petty official]' in the *Zhou li* 周礼 [*Rites of Zhou*] says: 'In ancient books *xi* 袭 [to inherit] is rendered as *xi* 习 [to practice, habit].' This is a proof."

Contemporary Translation

Heaven and earth and the myriad things all have a beginning—their root and source. If one gets to know the root and source, one can understand the myriad things; if one understands the myriad things, one can adhere to their root and source, [thus] facing no danger throughout one's life.

Seal off the desiring bodily cavities and close off the path of desire, and all life long there is no hard or disturbing affair. Open the desiring bodily cavities and add to messy affairs, and all life long there is no rescuing you.

To be able to observe the minute is called clarity; to be able to hold on to the soft is called strength. Use the shining light of wisdom to reflect back on inner clarity; do not bring disaster upon yourself—this is called the ceaseless, constant Dao.

Argument

This chapter has three main points. First, that one should pursue the root and source and grasp the principle from all things. Secondly, that one should not blindly satisfy one's material desires (a reckless satisfaction of desire causes one to lose oneself). Thirdly, that, during cognitive activity, one should eliminate personal desire and subjective opinions, look in at one's original acumen, and use the shining light of this acumen to perceive external things, so that one can discern the pattern of affairs (for this idea, also see "Argument" at the end of Chapter 47; here, the function of introspection (内视) is praised). The implicit message of this chapter is that people are keen on flaunting cleverness, instead of restraining and storing it—Laozi attempts to make people aware of the fact that they should not pour it out but store it in.

Fifty-Three

使我 (1) 介然有知 (2)，行於大道，唯施 (3) 是畏。
大道甚夷 (4)，而人 (5) 好徑 (6)。朝甚除 (7)，田甚蕪，倉甚虛；服文綵，帶利劍，厭 (8) 飲食，財貨有餘；是謂盜誇 (9)。非道也哉！

If I (1) *jieran* 介然 [concentrated, distinctive, intermediary] have knowledge (2), walking on the great way, only *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] (3) this I fear.

The great Dao is very *yi* 夷 [barbarian, foreigner, smooth] (4), but there are some people (5) who like *jing* 径 [path, footpath, track] (6). The court is very *chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of] (7), the fields are overgrown with weeds, the granaries stand empty; the clothes are refined and colorful, sharp swords are carried on the belt, *yan* 厌 [to detest, to be bored with] (8) drink and food, riches and goods are plentiful; this is called *dao* 盗 [to steal, robber] *kua* 夸 [to exaggerate, big, lavish] (9). Such is not the Dao!

Commentary and Explanation

1) I: Refers to a ruler who is in line with the Dao (有道).

Wang Zhen 王真 (late Tang, ca. 9th century): "The first person refers to the nobles."

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (ca. 13th century): "The 'I' here is Laozi himself."

2) *Jieran* 介然 [concentrated, distinctive, intermediary] have knowledge: Have a fraction or little bit of knowledge. *Jie* 介 means "very small" here, as is also the case in the following passages: "To have not the slightest worry" (无介然之虑者) (see the *Yang Zhu* 杨朱 chapter in the *Liezi* 列子 [*Writings of Master Lie*]). "*Jie* 介 means a little" ([*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 *Textual Explanations* [*of the Classics*]). Cheng Xuanying's 成玄英 (d. 669) commentary preserved in [the received] Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) edition says: "*Jieran* 介然 means very small."

3) *Shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered]: Irregular or evil (邪), crooked.

Wang Niansun 王念孙 (d. 1832): "The character *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] should be read as 'winding' or 'meandering' (迤) here. The whole sentence means that in proceeding upon the great Dao, one should only fear going astray on a crooked road. Further on in the text it says: 'The great Dao is very even, but the people enjoy following footpaths (径).' The *Heshang Gong zhu* 河上公注 [*Heshang Gong Commentary*]

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(1st century CE; dates unknown) notes: '*Jing* 径 means irregular, crooked.' This supports our reading. In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] we read: '*Yi* 迤 [winding, walk off a path] means "to wind"' and the book goes on to quote the *Yugong* 禹贡 [*Tribute of Yu*] (chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚书 [*Book of Documents*]): '[flowing] east and then winding north, joining the Poyang Lake.' In the chapter *Li Lou* 离娄 of the *Mengzi* 孟子 [*Writings of Master Meng*] there is the following passage: 'She followed (施从) her husband wherever he went.' Zhao Qi 赵岐 (d. 201) comments: 'The character *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] means to follow an irregular course.' According to Ding Gongzhu 丁公著 (d. 826), it should be pronounced the same way as *yi* 迤 [winding, walk off a path]. In the chapter *Qi su* 齐俗 [*Balancing Customs*] of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] it says: 'Those who reject what is wrong do not criticize what is crooked.' Gao You 高诱 (d. 212) comments: '*Shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] means slightly crooked.' In the chapter *Yao lüe* 要略 [*Outline of the Essentials*] of the same book there is another sentence: 'Receiving what is straight and making straight what is *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered].' Gao notes: '*Shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] means crooked.' All of this makes clear that the character *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] has the same meaning as *yi* 迤 [winding, walk off a path]." (*Laozi zazhi* 老子杂志 [*Miscellaneous Notes on the Laozi*], in *Dushu zazhi* 读书杂志 [*Miscellaneous Reading Notes*]).

Qian Daxin 钱大昕 (d. 1804): "The character *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] was pronounced as *xie* 斜 [tilted, inclined, slanted] in ancient times. In the *Jia sheng liezhuan* 贾生列传 [*Biography of Jia Yi*] in the *Shiji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] we read: 'On the 37th day of [the spring] when the sun sets.' In the *Hanshu* 汉书 [*Book of the Han*], we find *xie* 斜 [tilted, inclined, slanted] instead of *shi* 施 [to carry out, scattered] in this phrase. [Thus, it can be argued that] the characters *xie* 斜 [tilted, inclined, slanted] and *xie* 邪 [evil, unnatural, disaster] are the same both in pronunciation and meaning." (*Qian Yantang wenji* 潜研堂文集 [*Writings from the Hall of Secretive Inquiries*], quoted in Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) *Laozi jiaogu* 老子校诂 [*Collation of the Laozi*]).

4) *Yi* 夷 [barbarian, foreigner, smooth]: *Yi* 夷 [barbarian, foreigner, smooth] means even or smooth here.

In the Fan Yingyuan version we find *yi* 彸 instead of *yi* 夷 [barbarian, foreigner, smooth]. Fan notes: "*Yi* 彸 is found in ancient editions of the text. In the *Shuowen jiezi* this word is explained as meaning 'a road is even and easy to travel.'"

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "*Yi* 夷 [barbarian, foreigner, smooth] is a loan for *yi* 彝 which means an even road."

5) Some people: Refers to the ruler. Originally read "the people" (民). Amended in accordance with the meaning of the rest of the text as well as on the basis of the Jing Long era stele version.

In the Jing Long version, the Li Yue 李约 (d. 208) version, and the *Cijie* 次解 [*Daode zhenjing ci jie* 道德真经次解 (*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*)] version, we find "people" (人) instead of "the people" (民).

Yan Kejun 严可均 (d. 1843): "But some people (人) enjoy footpaths." (*Laozi Tangben yikao* 老子唐本异考 [*Investigation into the Differences in Tang-Dynasty Editions of the Laozi*]).

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939): "'Some people' refers to the ruler. All available editions mistakenly read 'the people', which does not match the meaning of the rest of the text. In all likelihood, the characters *ren* 人 [humans] and *min* 民 [the people] were used interchangeably in ancient texts. Here however, the word 'humans' refers to the ruler and thus obviously cannot be replaced by 'the people', that is why this emendation is necessary."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang): "As Xi Dong correctly indicates, 'the people' should be changed into 'people' here and refers to the ruler. The Jing Long edition correctly reads 'people', which corroborates Xi's interpretation."

6) *Jing* 径 [path, footpath, track]: A crooked path.

In the *Heshang Gong Commentary* it says: "*Jing* 径 means irregular and crooked."

7) The court is very *chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of]: The court is incredibly corrupt.

There are several interpretations for the character *chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of] here: firstly, as meaning (that the court is) clean and tidy. As Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) for example notes: "'Court' means the royal palace, *chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of] means nice and clean." Or as the *Heshang Gong Commentary* has it: "High are the terraces and pavilions, nicely decorated is the royal palace." Lu Xisheng 陆希声 (d. 895 or 901) notes: "Looking at how orderly and clean the palace is and how impressively engraved the walled dwellings are, it becomes clear how fond the ruler is of constructing buildings and how fond he is of indulging in little amusements." Secondly, *chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of] can also be interpreted as meaning lax or decadent. As Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) indicates: "*Chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of] has the same sense as ruined or corrupt (废). Here it describes how incompetent and negligent the court is." Ma

Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) on his part claims: "*Chu* 除 [to remove, to get rid of] is a loanword for *wu* 污 [foul, corrupt]." In my contemporary rendition of the text, I have followed the second line of interpretation.

8) *Yan* 厌 [to detest, to be bored with]: To be satiated.

The *Dunhuan* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] reads *yan* 餍 [satiated] instead of *yan* 厌 [to detest, to be bored with]. Here, *yan* 厌 [to detest, to be bored with] is a loanword for *yan* 猒 [same meaning as *yan* 厌]. In the *Shuowen jiezi* it says: "*Yan* 猒 means to be full, to have enough." *Yan* 餍 is a non-standard form of *yan* 猒.

9) *Dao* 盗 [to steal, robber] *kua* 夸 [to exaggerate, big, lavish]: A great robber. In the chapter *Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining the Laozi*] in the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] we find the expression *dao yu* 盗竽 instead of *dao gua* 盗夸. The text reads: "*Yu* 竽 [an ancient woodwind instrument] is superior among all musical instruments. Therefore, *yu* 竽 [an ancient woodwind instrument] plays first the bells and the *se* 瑟 [a string instrument] follows after. When the *yu* 竽 [an ancient woodwind instrument] sounds, all the other musical instruments join in chorus."

Gao Heng: "Phonologically speaking, *kua* 夸 [to exaggerate, big, lavish] and *yu* 竽 [an ancient woodwind instrument] belong to the same group of initials, which were used interchangeably in ancient times. On the basis of the text of the *Hanfeizi*, the word *daoyu* 盗竽 means something like *daokui* 盗魁 ['chief of bandits']. In the case of the word *yu* 竽 [an ancient woodwind instrument], the analogy is drawn from the superior status of *yu* 竽 [an ancient woodwind instrument] among musical instruments, whereas the character *kui* 魁 refers back to the image of the Big Dipper (斗); both cases illustrate the same idea [of being superior]."

Yan Lingfeng: "*Kua* 夸 [to exaggerate, big, lavish] means extravagant, deriving its meaning from the component *da* 大 [big, great] and its pronunciation from the component *kui* 亏 [lacking, deficient]. It has a similar meaning as 'great'. *Dao kua* 盗夸 means 'a great bandit'. It is similar in meaning to the term *daokui* 盗魁 ['chief of bandits']."

Contemporary Translation

If I had only the slightest bit of knowledge, I would walk upon the great Dao, my only worry would be to go astray on an evil path.

The great Dao is very even, but rulers still enjoy following crooked paths. The court is in a state of sheer corruption. As a result, the fields are barren as

stretches of wasteland and the granaries are completely empty. Still they dress themselves in splendid attire, they wear sharp and fine swords, they are satiated with exquisite food and drink, and have plundered the plentiful goods. These people are called the chiefs of all robbers. How far this is from the Dao!

Argument

This chapter provides a bitter description of the corrupted political culture in Laozi's age. Those in charge of governing clung to their power, engaged in plunder and extortion, and appropriated what was common to all to benefit themselves, leading a life of extravagance and debauchery, all while the people of the lower classes were on the brink of starvation. Given this situation, no wonder that Laozi furiously condemns those in power during his time as "chiefs of all robbers."

Fifty-Four

善建者不拔，善抱 (1) 者不脫，子孫以祭祀不輟 (2)。
修之於身，其德乃真；修之於家，其德乃餘；修之於鄉，其德乃長 (3)；修之於邦 (4)，其德乃豐；修之於天下，其德乃普。
故以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉　(5)，以邦觀邦，以天下觀天下。
吾何以知天下然哉？以此。

What has been well established cannot be uprooted, what has been well *bao* 抱 [to hold in one's arms, to embrace, to cherish] (1) does not become disconnected. The line of descendants through performing sacrificial rituals does not come to an end (2).

By cultivating it in oneself, its virtuosity (德) becomes genuine; cultivating it in one's family, its virtuosity will be in abundance; cultivating it in one's village, its virtuosity will be *chang* 长 [long, to grow] (3); cultivating it in one's *bang* 邦 [state, country] (4), its virtuosity will be plentiful; cultivating it in all under heaven, its virtuosity will be widespread.

Therefore, to observe oneself through oneself, to observe the family through the family, to observe the village through the village (5), to observe the state through the state, to observe all under heaven through all under heaven. How do we know that all under heaven is so? Thus.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Bao* 抱 [to hold in one's arms, to embrace, to cherish]: Denotes something firm and secure.
2) The line of descendants through performing sacrificial rituals does not come to an end: When each succeeding generation manages to abide by the principle of what is "well established" and "well safeguarded", the light of later generations will never die out.
3) *Chang* 长 [long, to grow]: Magnificent and prosperous. A note to the chapter *Zhi du* 知度 [*Recognizing the Proper Measure*] of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*] reads: "*Chang* 长 [long, to grow] means magnificent and prosperous (盛)."
4) *Bang* 邦 [state, country]: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version has *guo* 国 [state, country]. The word *bang* 邦 [state, country] is found in the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version as well as in a quotation in the *Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining the Laozi*] chapter from the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han*

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Fei]. Because of a taboo on the personal name of emperor Gaozu 高祖 (i.e. Liu Bang 刘邦) (d. 195 BCE) of the Han dynasty, the word *bang* 邦 [state, country] was replaced by *guo* 国 [state, country]. Amended on the basis of the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version, the *Jie Lao* chapter in the *Hanfeizi*, the Fu Yi version, and the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version.

Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) version reads *bang* 邦 [state, country]. Fan notes: "The character *bang* 邦 [state, country] occurs in the *Jie Lao* chapter of the *Hanfeizi* as well as in ancient editions."

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "All available editions read *guo* 国 [state, country] instead of *bang* 邦 [state, country]. This change was due to a taboo on the first name of emperor Gaozu of the Han dynasty. At the beginning of the Tang period, when the practice of collecting books was at its peak, there were still ancient editions from before the taboo."

Wei Yuan 魏源 (d. 1856): "In the ancient pronunciation, *ba* 拔 [pull, select] rhymed with *tuo* 脱 [remove, reverse] and *chuo* 辍 [stop, suspend], *shen* 身 [body, person] with *zhen* 真 [genuine, authentic], jia 家 [home, family] with *yu* 馀 [remainder, excess], *xiang* 乡 [village, township] with *chang* 长 [long, to grow], *bang* 邦 [state, country] with *feng* 丰 [abundant, plentiful], and *xia* 下 [lower, down] with *pu* 普 [popular, universal]. All available editions read *guo* 国 [state, country] instead of *bang* 邦 because of a taboo on the personal name of emperor Gaozu of the Han dynasty." (*Laozi benyi* 老子本义 [*The Original Meaning of the Laozi*])

Note: The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version reads *bang* 邦 [state, country]. In the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version, all instances of this character were replaced by *guo* 国 [state, country] because of the taboo on Liu Bang's first name. This makes clear that the *Mawangdui* versions were written during different periods. Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) remarks: "There are 22 instances in the version which can positively be identified as the character *bang* 邦 [state, country]. In this version, these have all been changed into *guo* 国 [state, country]. The personal name of emperor Gaozu was Bang. This shows that the writer of the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version intentionally avoided the taboo on Liu Bang's name. Since this not the case in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version, we can ascertain that it was copied before Liu Bang declared himself emperor." (*Shitan Mawangdui Hanmu zhong de boshu Laozi* 试探马王堆汉墓中的帛书老子 [*A Tentative Inquiry into the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi in the Han-dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui*])

5) Therefore, to observe oneself through oneself, to observe the family through the family, to observe the village through the village: To observe others from the perspective of oneself, to observe other families from the perspective of one's own family, to observe other villages from the perspective of one's own village.

Wang Bi: "Others are all like [oneself] (彼皆然也)."

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "From one's own body/person (身) one can observe the body/person (身) of others, from one's own family one can observe the families of others, from one's own village one can observe the villages of others."

Contemporary Translation

What excels at establishing cannot be uprooted, what excels at cherishing cannot be cast off. If the descendants can abide by this principle, the sacrificial offerings will continue uninterrupted from one generation to the next.

If one thoroughly applies this principle to oneself, one's virtuosity will become authentic; if [one] thoroughly applies [it] to the family, one's virtuosity will become abundant; if [one] applies [it] to the village, one's virtuosity will be revered; if [one] applies [it] to the state, one's virtuosity will be plentiful; if one applies [it] to the world, one's virtuosity will become universal.

Therefore, one should observe the individual self [of others] from [one's own] self, observe the family [of others] from [one's own] family, observe the village [of others] from [one's own] village, observe the state [of others] from [one's own] state, observe the world [of others] from [one's own] world. How do I know that this is the way things are in the world? By employing this principle.

Argument

"Cultivating oneself" is like solidifying the basis, it is the starting point both for establishing oneself as well as bringing order to the world. Laozi further emphasizes the importance of cultivating virtuosity in the whole spectrum extending from the limited sphere of self-cultivation to the broader field of governing the state. [Like Daoism] Confucianism also proposes teaching virtuosity throughout all levels of society, but there are slight differences in the exact procedures and arguments put forward between these different schools. In the chapter *Mu min* 牧民 [*Shepherding the People*] in the *Guanzi*

管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*] for instance, we also find a sequence of political action which proceeds from the family to the village, the state, and the world. However, the *Guanzi* believes that "the village cannot be managed in the same way as the family, the state cannot be managed in the same way as the village, the world cannot be managed in the same way as the state. The family should be treated as a family, the village should be treated as a village, the state should be treated as a state." The position put forward in the *Guanzi* corresponds to the *Laozi*'s notion of "observing the self from the self, observing the family from the family, observing the village from the village, observing the country from the country, and observing the world from the world." The *Guanzi* and the *Laozi* both differ quite radically from the sequence of "cultivating oneself, ordering the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world" described in the *Daxue* 大学 [*The Great Learning*]. In the text of the *Daxue*, the transition from cultivating the self to regulating the family is immediately followed up by an extension of the regulation of the family to the governance of the state. However, the "family" and the "state" not only differ in character and describe different fields, they also involve dealing with different things. The ability to regulate one's own family does not necessarily enable a person to govern the state. That being said, for all its grandiose pronouncements, the text of the *Daxue* is deeply impressive.

Fifty-Five

含德之厚，比於赤子。蜂蠆虺蛇不螫 (1)，攫鳥猛獸不搏 (2)。骨弱筋柔而握固。未知牝牡之合而朘作 (3)，精之至也。終日號而不嗄 (4)，和之至也。
知和曰常，知常曰明 (5)，益生 (6) 曰祥 (7)。心使氣曰強 (8)。物壯 (9) 則老，謂之不道，不道早已。

Containing thick *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power] [can be] compared to an infant. Wasps, *chai* 虿 [scorpion, insect], *hui* 虺 [snake] and snakes do not *shi* 螫 [sting, bite] [it] (1). *Jue* 攫 [grab, seize] birds and *meng* 猛 [ferocious, vigorous, sudden] beasts do not seize [it] (2). [Its] bones are feeble and muscles soft, but [its] grip is firm. [It] does not yet know the joining of the male and the female, but its *juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis[1]] is *zuo* 作 [to initiate, to arise] (3)—this is utmost *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy]. [It] screams all day but does not get *sha* 嗄 [hoarse] (4)—this is utmost harmony.

To know harmony is called constancy; to know constancy is called clarity (5). To add to life (6) is called *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] (7). The heart-mind deploying the *qi* is called *qiang* 强 [strong, to force] (8). If a thing is *zhuang* 壮 [robust, strong] [9], it is old—this is called not [going along with] the Dao. Not [going along with] the Dao ends early.

Commentary and Explication

1) Wasps, *chai* 虿 [scorpion, insect], *hui* 虺 [snake] and snakes do not *shi* 螫 [sting, bite] [it]: *Chai* 虿 [scorpion, insect] is a kind of scorpion; *hui* 虺 [snake] is a venomous snake; *shi* 螫 [sting, bite] means venomous creatures stinging people.

Many old texts, including He Shang Gong's 河上公 (1st century; dates unknown) commentary, the Jing Fu stele text, Li Yue's 李约 (d. 208), Lu Xisheng's 陆希声 (d. 895 or 901), Sima Guang's 司马光 (d. 1086), Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112), Lin Xiyi's 林锡逸 (d. 1271), and Wu Cheng's 吴澄 (d. 1333) texts—read "venomous creatures do not sting [it] (毒虫不螫)." The expression *du chong* 毒虫 [venomous creatures] refers to wasps, scorpions, vipers, and snakes. The Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) version is the same as

1 Tr. note: "Penis" is a special meaning of *juan* 朘—otherwise meaning "reduce, exploit"—here.

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the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)]—this should be the original *Laozi* text.

2) Birds of prey and ferocious beasts do not seize [it]: Birds that snatch their prey using claws, such as eagles and falcons. Both *jue* 攫 [grab, seize] and *meng* 猛 [ferocious, vigorous, sudden] are used to describe fierce creatures.

In the Wang Bi version, this sentence reads: "*Meng* 猛 [ferocious, vigorous, sudden] beasts do not seize [it]; *jue* 攫 [grab, seize] birds do not clutch (it) (猛兽不据，攫鸟不搏)." It is modified based on the *Mawangdui Manuscripts* and the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] so as to maintain consistency.

3) Its *juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis] is *zuo* 作 [to initiate, to arise]: An infant's genitalia being erect. In the Wang Bi version, the character *juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis] reads *quan* 全 [whole, entire, complete], an infant's genitalia. *Zuo* 作 [to initiate, to arise], means erect, raised. In place of *quan* 全 [whole, entire, complete] in the Wang Bi text, the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) text and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) read *juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis]; the *He Shang Gong* version and many other old texts read *zui* 𡭔.

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "*Juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis], the *Fu Yi* text and the old text(s) are the same; many contemporary texts read *zui* 𡭔. In *Yu pian* 玉篇 [*Jade Chapters*] the character *juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis] is glossed as *zui* 𡭔 and *zui* 𡭔—these three characters are interchangeable, all pronounced as the initial of *zi* 子 plus the final of *lei* 雷; [it refers to] an infant's genitalia."

Yi Shunding 易顺鼎 (d. 1920): *Juan* 朘 [reduce, exploit, penis] and *quan* 全 [whole, entire, complete] are close in sound; the latter might be a loan.

4) *Sha* 嗄 [hoarse]: Mute, hoarse (哑). The *He Shang Gong* version reads *ya* 哑 [mute, hoarse].

5) To know harmony is called constancy; to know constancy is called clarity: The *Guodian* version reads: "Harmony is called unity, to know harmony is called clarity (和曰 ，知和曰明)."

Wei Qipeng 魏启鹏 (b. 1942): "*Tong* is to be read as *tong* 同. The *Shang gu tian zhen lun* 上古天真论 [*On the Heavenly Genuineness in the Ancient Times*] chapter of the *Su wen* 素问 [*Basic Questions*] says: 'Be in a harmony with yin and yang (和于阴阳).' The Wang Bing 王冰 (d. ca. 804) commentary reads: 'This harmony refers to the unified harmony (和为同和).' Such is the sense of Chapter 42 of the *Laozi*: 'Everything shoulders yin and embraces yang, surging *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy,

material] forms a harmony.' (The *Cheng kai* 成开 [*Instruction to King Cheng*] chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周书 [*Lost Book of Zhou*]: '*Zhong he nai tong* 众和乃同 [the harmony among the multitude then unifies (them)].' Kong Huang's 孔晃 (d. ca. 3rd century) commentary reads: 'Unity means harmonious unity (同谓和同);' also, *he* 和 [harmony] and *tong* 同 [unity] are used to explain one another. A deeper interpretation shows that, 'harmony is called unity 和曰同.' This refers to a state of embodying the Dao". (*Chujian 'Laozi' jianshi* 楚简《老子》柬释 [*Selective Commentary on the Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*] included in an issue of *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 [*Research on Daoist Culture*] edited by Chen Guying 陈鼓应 and dedicated to the *Guodian Bamboo Slips*).

6) To add to life: To indulge one's desires and to covet life.

7) *Xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen]: To be read here particularly as ominous omen (妖祥), inauspicious (不详).

Lin Xiyi: "*Xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] means ominous (*yao* 妖) here. The *Chun qiu zuo zhuan* 春秋左传 [*The Commentary of Zuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals*] has: 'What sort of *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] is that?' The word *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] in this chapter is used in such a sense too."

Fan Yingyuan: "*Xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen], strange and curious."

Yi Shunding: "Note: *Xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] means *bu xiang* 不祥 [inauspicious] here. The *Shu xu* 书序 [*Preface of the Book of Documents*] has: 'There was *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] that *sang* 桑 [mulberry tree] and *gu* 谷 [grain plants] grew together at the court,' in which the word *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] is used in the same sense as the one used here. Wang Bi comments on this chapter: 'Life cannot be added to, [if one attempts to] add to [it] and then there will be *yao* 夭 [premature death].' *Yao* 夭 [premature death] should be read as *yao* 妖 [evil, ominous] here, so as to use it to interpret *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen]."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "The *Liuyuan zhengji dalun* 六元正纪大论 [*A Grand Theory of the Six Climatic Sources within a Formal Period*] chapter of the *Su wen* 素问 [*Basic Questions*] says: 'Omens are seen in the water (水乃见祥).' The *Commentary* says: '*Xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] is *yao xiang* 妖祥 [evil omen].' The annotation to the commentary on the section 'The 16th year of the reign of Duke Xi (僖公十六年)' of the *Chun qiu zuo zhuan* 春秋左传 [*The Commentary of Zuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals*] records: 'Sinister affairs are also called *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen].' The *Daode zhenjing qu shan ji* 道德真经取善集 [*Collection of the Quality Commentaries on the Genuine Daodejing*] quotes Sun Deng 孙登 (d. 241): 'Richness in nourishing life, evil omens

act (生生之厚，动之妖祥).' It also quotes Shu Wang 舒王[2] (d. 1086): 'This *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen], does not stand for a good omen but an omen of calamity and oddity.' *Xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] here is *yao xiang* 妖祥 [evil omen]."

8) *Qiang* 强 [strong, to force]: Flaunting force, violent.
9) *Zhuang* 壮 [robust, strong]: Strong. Wang Bi's commentary to Chapter 30 reads: "*Zhuang* 壮 [robust, strong], military force rapidly increases." *Zhuang* 壮 [robust, strong] here is the same as *qiang* 强 [strong, to force] in the preceding sentence.

Contemporary Translation

Those of deep *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power] can be compared to an infant. Wasps, scorpions, and venomous snakes do not bite it; fierce birds and ferocious beasts do not capture it. Its muscles and bones are pliant and delicate, but its hand grip is firm. It does not yet know of the intercourse of the male and the female, but its penis gets spontaneously erect—this is because its seminal *qi* (精气) is abundant. It cries all day long, but its throat does not get hoarse—this is because its original *qi* (元气) is pure and harmonious (淳和).

Knowing the principle of purity and harmony is called "constancy"; knowing constancy is called "clarity." Craving life and indulging desires brings about disaster, the scheming mind controlling harmonious *qi* is no more than flaunting force. Excessive strength tends toward deterioration—this is called not matching the Dao. Not matching the Dao brings about quick death.

Argument

Laozi uses the image of an infant as an analogy for a deeply cultivated person capable of reverting to an infant-like state of unadulteration and softness. "Utmost *jing* 精 [essence, semen, seminal energy]" describes a state of full and abundant spirit, and "utmost harmony," the state of a concentrated and harmonious mind.

2 Tr. note: Shu Wang refers to the posthumous title of Wang Anshi 王安石.

Fifty-Six

知者不言，言者不知 (1)。
塞其兌，閉其門 (2)，挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵 (3)，是謂“玄同” (4)。故不可得而親，不可得而疏；不可得而利，不可得而害；不可得而貴，不可得而賤 (5)。故爲天下貴。

Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know (知者不言，言者不知) (1).

Fill the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], close the(ir) *men* 门 [gate, door][1] (2), dull the sharpness, untie the knots, temper the radiance, unite with the dust[2] (3). This is what is called “dark unity” (玄同) (4). Therefore, it cannot be made intimate, it cannot be made distant, it cannot be made to bring profit, it cannot be made to bring harm, it cannot be honored, it cannot be dishonored (5). That is why it is the most valuable thing in the world.

Commentary and Explanation

1) Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know (知者不言，言者不知): The *Guodian* jian 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version reads “those who are wise do not speak, those who speak are not wise (智之者弗言，言之者弗智).” The literal interpretation of this sentence is “people who know do not speak, people who speak do not know,” but I suspect that “those who know” should read “those who are wise.”

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999): “The two characters ‘wise (智)’ in this sentence originally read ‘to know (知)’ and should be pronounced in the fourth tone as the *zhi* 智 in ‘wisdom (智慧).’ In his [*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 [*Textual Explanations of the Classics*], Lu Deming 陆德明 (d. 630) writes: ‘The word “to know (知)” is also read as *zhi* 智.’ In his commentary on the phrase ‘those who are wise do not speak,’ Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) notes: ‘Those who know (知者) value actions, and not words.’ Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) comments on the same phrase: ‘[It means] to rely on what is self-so.’ Additionally,

1 Tr. note: This line is translated as “Block the holes, shut the gates” in Chapter 52.

2 Tr. note: This line appears in Chapter 4 as well, where it is translated slightly differently based on the context.

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concerning the phrase 'those who speak do not know', Heshang Gong remarks: 'What has been spoken cannot be unsaid, more words [will only] lead to much anxiety.' Wang Bi comments: 'It creates trouble.' I suspect both the Heshang Gong and the Wang Bi versions should read *zhi* 智 instead of *zhi* 知. In his book *Tao, the Great Luminant* (*Essays from the Huai Nan Tzu*), Evan Morgan (d. 1941) quotes a poem by the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (d. 846) on the *Laozi*: 'I have heard from Laozi that those who speak are not wise, and that the wise remain silent. But if the old gentleman of the Dao was wise (智者), then why did he compose a book of five thousand characters?' Morgan translates '智' as 'wise.' This suffices to prove that in the Tang dynasty (618–907), some ancient editions of the *Laozi* also read *zhi* 智 instead of *zhi* 知. Furthermore, in a photographic reproduction of a Korean text from the Joseon dynasty entitled *Daojia lunbian Mouzi lihuo lun* 道家论辩牟子理惑论 [*Refutations of Daoism, Mouzi's* (2nd century CE; dates unknown) *Treatise on Settling Doubts*] the first phrase is quoted as 'those who are wise do not speak.' Additionally, in the Japanese *Dazangjing Mouzi lihuo lun* 大藏经牟子理惑论 [*Taishō Tripiṭaka, Mouzi's Treatise on Settling Doubts*], the whole sentence is correctly quoted as 'those who are wise do not speak, those who speak are not wise.'" In my contemporary translation, I have followed Yan's suggestions.

"Speaking (言)" refers to ruling via renown authority, education, and issuing authoritative top-down decrees (声教政令); see Chapter 2, note 9, Chapter 17, note 4, and Chapter 23, note 1. Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "Here 'speaking' refers to political decrees, not to language as such."

2) Fill the(ir) *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice], close the(ir) *men* 门 [gate, door]: These two phrases already appear in Chapter 52 (see note 4 of that chapter). The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version has "*xuan qi shui* 閔其兌，*sai qi men* 賽（塞）其门." *Xuan* 閔 is an alternative form of *bi* 闭 [to close, shut], *shui* 兑 is a loanword for *dui* 兑 [cavity, orifice] and refers to the human orifices (according to Wei Qipeng's 魏启鹏 [b. 1942] remarks).

3) Dull the sharpness, untie the knots, temper the radiance, unite with the dust: Do not flaunt your abilities, resolve disputes, show restraint in displaying your brilliance, and merge with the earthly world.[3] These sentences also appear in Chapter 4.

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970): "Breaking off sharpness, resolving disputes, tempering radiance, and uniting with the dust: this is the exact meaning of 'dark unity (玄同).' These four phrases are absolutely indispensable."

3 Tr. note: We might interpret this line to mean something like "merging with ordinary people."

4) Dark unity (玄同): A realm of mysterious wonderful equalization-unity, that is to say, the realm of Dao. Wang Chunfu 王纯甫 (d. 1547) remarks: "Dark unity refers to a great form of unity with [all things] which does not bear any outward signs (迹) [of unification]." (Quoted from *Laozi yi* 老子亿 [*Conjecture about the Laozi*]).
5) Therefore, it cannot be made intimate, it cannot be made distant, it cannot be made to bring profit, it cannot be made to bring harm, it cannot be honored, it cannot be dishonored. "Dark unity" is a sphere transcending the distinctions between close/intimate and distant relations, benefit and harm, and nobility and humility.

   Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "This refers to going beyond the difference between close/intimate and distant relations, benefit and harm, and nobility and humility."

   Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "Because the sage is merely sojourning in this world, because his mind transcends the realm of the external things, and because he is not caught up in the distinctions between what is intimate and distant, beneficial and harmful, or noble and humble, he is the most precious thing in the world."

Contemporary Translation

People who possess wisdom do not speak much, people who talk much are not wise.

Block up the orifices of desire, close the access points of craving, do not flaunt your talents, resolve disputes, show restraint in displaying your brilliance, and merge with the earthly world. This is the realm of mysterious wonderful equalization-unity. Here no distinction is drawn between close/intimate and distant relations, between profit and harm, or between nobility and humility. That is why it is the most respectable and precious thing in the world.

Argument

An ideal human personality "blunts sharpness, unties the knots, tempers radiance, and unites with the dust" in order to attain the supreme realm of "dark unity." The realm of "dark unity" removes personal bias, eliminates all boundaries and barriers, and transcends the narrow limitations of ordinary

interpersonal relations in order to make room for approaching all people and things with an open and unprejudiced state of mind.

The biggest difference between Laozi's and Zhuangzi's philosophy is that the former hardly discusses specific realms as states of mind, whereas the latter puts great effort into propagating his own particular brand of existential realm. If there is something like a "realm (境界)" to be found in Laozi's philosophy, then the idea of "dark unity" described in this chapter probably comes closest.

Fifty-Seven

以正 (1) 治國，以奇 (2) 用兵，以無事取天下 (3)。吾何以知其然哉？以此 (4)：
天下多忌諱，而民彌貧 (5)；民 (6) 多利器 (7)，國家滋昏；人多伎巧 (8)，奇物 (9) 滋起；法令滋彰 (10)，盜賊多有。
故聖人雲：“我無爲，而民自化 (11)；我好靜，而民自正；我無事，而民自富；我無欲，而民自樸。”

Govern the state with *zheng* 正 [upright, correct, align, rectify] (1), employ military means with *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful] (2), take control of (取) the world by not undertaking anything (3). How do I know this to be so? Because of this (以此) (4):

The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world, the more impoverished the people will become (5); if people (6) have many sharp instruments (7), the state and families will become more and more shrouded in darkness; if people use many clever techniques (8), strange things (9) will arise ever more often; the more conspicuous laws and decrees become (10), the more bandits and robbers there will be.

And so the sage says: “I do not act, and the people self-transform (自化) (11); I delight in tranquility, and the self *zheng* 正 [upright, correct, align, rectify]; I do not undertake anything, and the people self thrive; I am without desires, and the people self-simplify.”

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Zheng* 正 [upright, correct, align, rectify]: Refers to the Dao of serenity.

   Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) notes: “The world and the state should approach serenity and the absence of desires as the correct [path].”

2) *Qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful]: Ingenious, secretive; to adapt oneself to changing circumstances. The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] versions have *ji* 畸 [irregular, lopsided] instead of *qi/ji* 奇.

3) Take control of (取) the world: To govern the world.

   Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972) notes: “To take control of the world means to win the people’s heart. […] In a comment to the chapter *Wang zhi* 王制 [*Kingly Regulations*] of the *Xunzi* 荀子 [*Writings of Master Xun*], Yang Liang 杨倞 (8th–9th century; dates unknown) says: ‘To take control of the people means to win their hearts.’”

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4) Because of this (以此): These two characters are missing in both the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] and the *Mawangdui* versions.

5) The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world, the more impoverished the people will become: The *Guodian* version reads: "The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world, the more *pan* 畔 (叛 [treasonous, rebellious]) the people will become." The text of the *Guodian* edition is to be preferred above all other versions.

Peng Hao 彭浩 (b. 1944) comments: "'*Pan* 畔 [boundary, side, edge]' is a loanword for '*pan* 叛 [treasonous, rebellious]'. The whole sentence means that the more prohibitions are issued by the ruler, the more likely the people are to rebel. Corresponds to the phrase 'the state will be shrouded in darkness' further on in the text." (*Guodian chujian Laozi jiaodu* 郭店楚简老子校读 [*Collation and Reading of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips of the Laozi*]).

6) The people: The Jing Long 景龙 stele[1] version, the Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (d. 762) version, the Qiang Siqi 强思齐 (10th century; dates unknown) version, the Wang Chunfu 王纯甫 (d. 1547) version, as well as many other ancient editions have "people (人)" instead of "the people (民)".

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) comments: "In accordance with most editions, 'the people' should read 'people.' The four phrases 'the more prohibitions there are in the world,' 'if people have many sharp instruments,' 'if people use many clever techniques,' and 'the more conspicuous laws and decrees become' could all be said to refer to the ruler and are intended to make clear that someone who is always undertaking things is not fit to govern the world. This is corroborated by the fact that the sentence 'the sharp instruments (利器) of a state cannot be shown to people' from Chapter 36 also refers to the ruler."

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) notes: "Pan Jingguan's 潘静观 (dates unknown) version has *chao* 朝 [court, government] instead of 'the people.' Chapter 36 mentions 'sharp instruments (利器) of a state.' In Chapter 53 there is the phrase 'the court (朝) is very crooked', which would seem to indicate that *chao* 朝 [court, government] is a more adequate reading here."

7) Sharp instruments: Sharp weapons. According to one interpretation, a metaphor for intrigues and schemes.

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1 Tr. note: Reference to the second era name (707–710) of the Tang dynasty emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (d. 710).

Wang Chunfu remarks: "Sharp instruments refers to 'sharp instruments (利器) of a state,' such as intelligence and conspiracy and the like."

8) Clever techniques: Skillfulness, more precisely ingenuity.

The Lü Huiqing 吕惠卿 (d. 1111) version, the Chen Xianggu 陈象古 (11th century; dates unknown) version, the Kou Caizhi 寇才质 (12th century; dates unknown), the Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, as well many other ancient editions render *ji* 伎 [technique] as *ji* 技 [technique, skill]. The [*Daode zhenjing*] *cijie* [道德真经] 次解 [*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*] edition has *zhi* 知 [to know] instead, as is also the case in the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version. The Zhao Zhijian 赵至坚 (ca. 8th century) version has *zhi* 智 [wisdom]. The Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) edition has *zhihui* 智慧 [wisdom and knowledge] instead of *jiqiao* 伎巧 [technique, skill]. 'Wisdom' is written *zhihui* 智惠 [wisdom and knowledge] in the Fan Yingyuang 范应元 (ca. 13th century; dates unknown) edition. If we look at all these different versions of the text, it becomes clear that *jiqiao* 伎巧 [technique, skill] means "ingenuity" or "trickery."

Wang Chunfu notes: "*Qiao* 巧 [skill, cunning, deceit] can also mean trickery, not only a technique or skill."

9) Strange things: Heinous incidents. The *Guodian* version has "*ge* 戒 things." *Ge* 戒 should be interpreted as "harsh (苛)," a character which we find in the compounds *keke* 苛刻 [pitiless] and *kexi* 苛细 [exacting]. *Ke wu* 苛物 [harsh things] has the same meaning as *ke shi* 苛事 [demanding affairs]; the use of the character *ke* 苛 in this compound being similar to that in *kezheng* 苛政 [tyranny] and *keli* 苛礼 [excessively ceremonial or formal] (according to Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 [b. 1935]).

The Fan Yingyuan version reads *xie shi* 亵事 [evil occurrences]. Fan notes: "*Xie* 亵 [slit in garments] has the same meaning as xie 邪 [evil, irregular, nefarious] and refers to deviant occurrences."

10) The more conspicuous laws and decrees become: Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version reads, "the more conspicuous ceremonial regalia (法物) become", which is the same as in the *Guodian* version and the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version.

Heshang Gong notes: "'Ceremonial regalia' are desirable things. When precious and desirable objects become more and more conspicuous, the work of farming will be abandoned and hunger and cold will strike at the same time. That is why there will be more bandits and robbers."

11) I do not act, and the people self-transform (自化): Self-transform (自化) means to cultivate oneself.

Chen Yang 晨阳 (dates unknown) comments: "What is introduced here is the problem of the desire to possess things. Why there was the enormous social chaos at the end of the Zhou period, that was because 'the son of heaven (天子)' and the feudal lords vied against one another and took up arms and engaged in wars because of their 'desire to posses', which led to too many events and affairs in 'the world (天下)' and deprived the people of peace. What Laozi wants to achieve is to restrain selfish desire, eliminate exploitation, and allow people to fulfill their basic needs, to 'sweeten their food, embellish their clothes, bring peace to their homes and joy to their customs' (Chapter 80). By contrast, he opposes 'riches and goods being plentiful' (Chapter 53), prefers not to 'value goods that are difficult to obtain' (Chapter 3), and advocates 'getting rid of what is of extreme, extravagant, and excessive' (Chapter 29). This suffices to make clear that Laozi rejects unreasonable systems of exploitation. For him, 'not acting' and 'having no desires' are connected. 'Not acting' means not doing something in order to contend with others, 'having no desires' means that one should not desire to possess other people's goods." (*Laozi de zhexue* 老子的哲学 [*The Philosophy of Laozi*], *Hebei shifandaxue xuebao* 河北师范大学学报 [*Hebei Normal University Academic Journal*], 1981, no. 3.)

Contemporary Translation

Govern the state through serenity, use military means in a shrewd manner, and govern the world by not disturbing the people. How do I know that it is like this? From the following matters:

The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world, the more people will fall into poverty. The more people use sharp weapons, the more the state will sink into darkness and turmoil. The more people use ingenious skills, the more often heinous incidents will occur. The stricter laws and decrees are, the faster the number of bandits and robbers will grow.

That is why someone who is in line with the Dao says: "I do not act and the people cultivate themselves; I delight in tranquility, and the people spontaneously get on the right track; I do not interfere, and the people prosper out of themselves; I have no greedy desires, and the people naturally embrace simplicity."

Argument

"The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world, the more impoverished the people will become [...] the more conspicuous laws and decrees become, the more bandits and robbers there will be." Here, we not only see that Laozi rejects all forms of punitive governance, but we also get an idea of the age Laozi lived in, an age marked by the chaos of war and the tyrannical abuse of power, which makes it clear that he had very good reasons for advocating "non-action." William James (d. 1910) once said: "The pretentious belief that one is qualified to arbitrarily pronounce judgement on other people's ideals is the cause of the inequality and brutality between the majority of people." Those in power often believe they have a very special role to play in society and establish all sorts of norms which suit their own personal intentions, behave unscrupulously, and violently impose their own will on others. Laozi's idea of not intervening and letting things take their course emerged within these specific circumstances. His introduction of the notion of "non-action" was to get rid of the coerciveness of the ruling factions in society, while also being intended to encourage spontaneity on the part of the people.

This chapter runs parallel with Chapter 37, but also provides us with a more concrete picture, and ends with the following lines: "I do not act, and the people transform themselves; I delight in tranquility, and the people rectify themselves; I do not undertake anything, and the people thrive by themselves; I am without desires, and the people make themselves simple again." This is how Laozi pictures an ideal society governed through a "politics of non-action."

Fifty-Eight

其政悶悶 (1)，其民淳淳 (2)；其政察察 (3)，其民缺缺 (4)。
禍兮，福之所倚；福兮，禍之所伏。孰知其極？其無正　(5)。正復爲奇，善復爲妖 (6)。人之迷，其日固久 (7)。
是以聖人方而不割 (8)，廉而不劌 (9)，直而不肆 (10)，光而不耀 (11)。

When governance is *menmen* 闷闷 [muffled, gloomy] (1), the people will be *chunchun* 淳淳 [simple, unsophisticated]. When governance is *chacha* 察察 [discerning, meticulous] (3), the people will be *queque* 缺缺 [to lack, deficient, damaged] (4).

How misfortunate!, that on which fortune leans; how fortunate!, that in which misfortune hides. Who knows where their limits are? There is no *zheng* 正 [correct, straight, regularity] (5). What is regular becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, unusual, irregular], what is good becomes *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, deviancy] (6). The delusion of human beings has certainly been around for a long time (7).

And so the sages are square but do not cut (8), they are *lian* 廉 [clean, upright] without *gui* 刿 [to cut, injure], they are straight without being *si* 肆 [wanton, unscrupulous] (10), they are radiant without being dazzling (11).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Menmen* 闷闷 [muffled, gloomy]: Dark and indistinct, denotes a sense of magnanimity here. In Chapter 20 we find the phrase "I alone am *menmen* 闷闷", describing a state of simplicity.

2) *Chunchun* 淳淳 [simple, unsophisticated]: Means honest and simple. The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version has *zhunzhun* 屯屯 [hard, obtuse].

   Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) notes: "*Chun* 淳 [simple, unsophisticated] is a loanword for *dun* 惇 [sincere, generous]. In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Analyzing Graphs and Explaining Characters*] it says: '*Dun* 惇 means magnanimous.'"

3) *Chacha* 察察 [discerning, meticulous]: Strict and harsh (see note 18 to Chapter 20).

   Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) notes: "*Chacha* 察察 [discerning, meticulous] refers to being concerned with trifling details."

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4) *Queque* 缺缺 [to lack, deficient, damaged]: Means cunning and treacherous.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: "*Queque* 缺缺 [to lack, deficient, damaged] describes a treacherous appearance."

Gao Heng remarks: "*Queque* 缺缺 [to lack, deficient, damaged] is a loanword for *kuai* 狯 [cunning]. In the *Shuowen jiezi*, we read: '*Kuai* 狯 means crafty.' *Kuaikuai* 狯狯 means treacherous."

5) There is no *zheng* 正 [correct, straight, regularity]: "They have no certainty" refers to the fact that fortune and misfortune constantly alternate.

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) comments: "Having no regularity has the same meaning as not being stable (定)."

Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (d. 1972) notes: "In the phrase 'there is no regularity', *zheng* 正 should be read as meaning 'stability.' What is described is the instability [of fortune and misfortune]. In the *Yupian* 玉篇 [*Jade Chapters*][1] it says: '*Zheng* 正 means lasting (长) and stable.' Here, it is understood as meaning 'stable.' This passage argues that fortune and misfortune are interrelated and that no one knows their limits. The instability of fortune and misfortune refers to the fact that no one knows where they are bound for."

6) What is regular becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, unusual, irregular], what is good becomes *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic]: What is upright will become evil and what is good will become evil.

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) notes: "*Qi/ji* 奇 means evil (邪), *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic] means not good, evil. This means that what is upright will become evil again and that what is good will become evil again. Fortune and misfortune constantly alternate in mutual interdependence."

Tong Shuye 童书业 (d. 1968) comments: "At the very least, Laozi was already aware of the law of the unity of opposites and understood that opposites can complement each other. For example, without 'being' there can be no 'non-being', without 'difficulty,' there would be no 'ease,' the 'short' would not be able to exist without the 'long' and so on. At the same time, he also realized that opposites can transform into each other. For example, what is 'beautiful' can change into what is 'ugly,' what is 'good' can change into what is 'bad.' This is due to the fact that all things contain the factors of their own negation within themselves. 'Misfortune' for instance 'is what fortune leans on,' and 'fortune' in turn 'is where misfortune hides'; the two are both contrary and complementary to each other and are constantly transforming and developing. That is why the

1 Tr. note: A dictionary compiled by Gu Yewang 顾野王 (d. 581).

text says: 'Who knows where their limits are?' What is regular can change into what is irregular, what is good can change into what is evil. This dialectical method of observation constitutes Laozi's greatest philosophical accomplishment."

7) The delusion of human beings has certainly been around for a long time: Human beings have been deluded for a very long time.

Yan Lingfeng notes: "This means that human beings are deluded concerning the category of fortune and misfortune and remain oblivious to the principles of circulation and mutual engendering [which govern fortune and misfortune]. It must have been like this for a long time."

8) They are square but do not cut: To be upright without harming others.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) comments: "'Square' refers to the fact that square objects have edges on all sides, which are as sharp as the edge of a knife and can injure people, which is why the text speaks of 'cutting.' When a person is 'square' in this sense and refuses to change/be flexible when encountering and dealing with things, they will inevitably bring harm [to them]. Sages on the other hand do not 'cut' things."

9) They are *lian* 廉 [clean, upright] without *gui* 刿 [to cut, injure]: To be sharp or incisive without injuring others. *Lian* 廉 [clean, upright] means "sharp" (利), *gui* 刿 means "to injure."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) notes: "*Lian* 廉 [clean, upright] is a loanword for 'sharp' or 'advantage (利).' In the chapter *Jinyu* 晋语 [*Discourses of Jin*] of the *Guoyu* 国语 [*Discourses of the States*] we encounter the phrase 'to consider killing the ruler as *li* 利', which means killing the ruler for one's own advantage. In the *Shanmu* 山木 [*A Mountain Tree*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we read: 'What is completed will fall apart, what is *lian* 廉 [clean, upright] will suffer defeat', where it is argued that advantage will lead to setbacks. In the *Meng Qiu* 孟秋 chapter [*Early Autumn or July*] of the *Lülan* 吕览 [*Examinations of Lü*][2] it says: 'His vessels are *li* 利 [sharp, benefit, profit] and deep', meaning that the vessels are angular and deep. In a note to the chapter *Pin yi* 聘义 [*The Meaning of Dispatching Envoys*] of the *Liji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*], Zheng [Xuan] 郑 [玄] (d. 200) remarks: '*Gui* 刿 [to cut, injure] means to injure.' These examples show that the phrase '廉而不刿' means being sharp without injuring."

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998) notes: "'To be sharp without injuring' is an ancient expression, which also appears in the chapter *Bu gou* 不苟

2 Tr. note: Better known as the *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*].

[*Nothing Indecorous*] of the *Xunzi* 荀子 [*Writings of Master Xun*]. Yang Jiang's 杨倞[3] (8th–9th century; dates unknown) note to this passage reads: '*Lian* 廉 [clean, upright] means [sharp] edge.' In the *Shuowen jiezi* we read: '*Gui* 刿 [to cut, injure] means to injure with something sharp.' With only the sharp edge, it is not sufficient for cut injury."

10) They are straight without being *si* 肆 [wanton, unscrupulous]: Being forthright without becoming impudent.

Wu Cheng comments: "Someone who is forthright is unable to hold anything back and speaks in an unscrupulous manner while rebuking others for their shortcomings. A sage however shows no such impudence."

11) They are radiant without being dazzling: Shining without becoming unbearably bright and dazzling.

Wu Cheng notes: "One who shines is unable to show restraint in displaying himself. He makes a spectacle of his conduct and flaunts his own strength. A sage however does not dazzle."

Contemporary Translation

When the government is magnanimous, the people will become honest and simple. When the government is harsh and strict, the people will become treacherous.

Misfortune, that is what fortune relies on. Fortune, that is what misfortune hides in. Who knows what they are ultimately all about? There is no certainty about them at all! What is regular can suddenly turn into what is irregular, what is good can suddenly turn into what is evil. Human beings have been deluded about this for a long time.

This is why those in line with the Dao are upright without injuring others, they are incisive without hurting others, they are forthright without becoming impudent, they are shining without being dazzling.

Argument

"When governance is dark and indistinct": This refers to a form of quiet government through "non-action"; "when governance is strict and unforgiving" refers

3 Tr. note: The character 倞 can be pronounced as "*liang*" (v., to ask for), or "*jing*" (adj., strong). However, according to a new research (Huo Shengyu 霍生玉, 2015), the proper pronunciation is "*jiang*". We endorse Huo's finding in our translation.

to a form of harsh government through "purposive action." Laozi advocates governing through "non-action" and believes that a magnanimous mode of governance will lead to an atmosphere of honesty in society and allow people to live in simplicity, and that this is necessary to allow a community to embark upon the path of tranquility and moderation. What Laozi hopes for is that the people will be allowed to enjoy happy and peaceful lives, passing their days safely and carefree. In this sense, Laozi's political ideals do contain a positive dimension in that he wants to bring order to the chaos of the world, although his idea of how such ideals ought to be implemented and his overall attitude is distinct from that of other ancient Chinese philosophers. This also becomes clear in his description of an ideal human personality. He writes: "Sages are upright without injuring, they are incisive without harming, they are forthright without becoming impudent, they are radiant without dazzling." "Uprightness", "incisiveness", "forthrightness", and "radiance" describe positive human attitudes. "Without injuring", "without harming", "without impudence", and "without dazzling" describe the absence of coercion. What is meant here is that when someone who is in line with the Dao governs, this involves enacting positive ideals which are not experienced as coercive by the people.

"How misfortunate!, that on which fortune leans; how fortunate!, that in which misfortune hides." The interdependence of fortune and misfortune is bound to call to mind the story of an "Old Man Who Lives at the Frontier," who lost his horse, which illustrates that no one can ever know whether misfortune is actually a blessing in disguise or the other way around. In everyday life, the roots of good fortune often lie concealed in misfortune, and factors of misfortune are often hidden inside good fortune, which means that fortune and misfortune depend on and engender each other. As a matter of fact, this also applies to regularity and irregularity and good and evil. Everything that exists constantly becomes interrelated and transformed within oppositional relations, and this process of reversal and transformation never comes to an end. The principles of such cyclical change and interdependence are often baffling and remain incomprehensible to people. Laozi indicates that we cannot remain at a superficial level of observation, but instead should try to see through the inner side of things by starting out from their manifest features and thus arriving at a comprehensive form of understanding. Laozi broadens our observational perspective and allows us to free ourselves from the limitations of the actual circumstances in which we find ourselves, so that we can avoid becoming trapped in any current predicaments or attached to our current state of mind.

Fifty-Nine

治人事天 (1)，莫若嗇 (2)。
夫唯嗇，是謂早服 (3)；早服謂之重積德 (4)；重積德則無不克；無不克則莫知其極；莫知其極，可以有國；有國之母 (5)，可以長久；是謂深根固柢，長生久視 (6) 之道。

In governing people and serving (事) heaven (1), there is nothing better than *se* 嗇 [sparingly, miserly, to treasure] (2).

Now as for treasuring, it is what is called *zao* 早 [early] *fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out] (3); being prepared early is called *chong* 重 [again, once more, to double, overlap] accumulating efficacy (4); when efficacy is accumulated time and again, there is nothing that cannot be overcome; when there is nothing that cannot be overcome, no one knows [the ruler's] limitations; when no one knows the limitations, the state can be possessed; the mother of possessing the state (5) can be lastingness; this is what is called having deep roots and firm foundations, it is the Dao of long life and lasting *shi* 视 [to see, sight] (6).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Serving (事) heaven: taking good care of what has been endowed by heaven. (see Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999), *Laozi dajie* 老子达解 [*Comprehensive Interpretation of the Laozi*]).

There are two possible interpretations of the word "heaven (天)" here. Firstly, as meaning what is "self-so (自然)." Cheng [Xuanying] 成玄英 (d. 669) comments: "Heaven is what is self-so." Secondly, as referring to the body or self (身). Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: "A person who regulates his body must cherish his essential vital energy without lowering his guard." (In my contemporary translation,) I have followed the latter interpretation.

Wang Chunfu 王纯甫 (d. 1547) comments: "Serving heaven means to keep intact what has been endowed by heaven, it refers to cultivating oneself."

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Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) comments: "In the chapter *Xian ji* 先己 [*Focusing on the Self First*] of the *Lülan* 吕览 [*Examinations of Lü*][1] we read: 'They *shi* 事 [serve] what is nonessential.'" Gao You 高诱 (d. 212) notes: "'*Shi* 事 means to govern or regulate.' Additionally, in the chapter *Bensheng* 本生 [*The Origin of Life*] of the same work, it says: 'To keep what is heavenly intact.' Gao notes: 'The heavenly refers to the body.' When the people are governed sparingly, they will not have to toil, when the body is regulated sparingly, its vitality will not be exhausted."

Yan Lingfeng notes: "Here, 'heaven' means the natural constitution (性) of the body, in the sense of keeping what is [endowed by] heaven intact. 'Serving heaven' has the same meaning as 'regulating one's body.'"

Note: The central focus in this chapter is the idea of "cherishing (啬)." "Cherishing" constitutes "the Dao of long life and enduring regime/ruling." In his commentary, Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) remarks: "This applies as much to governing a state as to nourishing life (养生). If one nourishes life sparingly (啬), then longevity lies within reach." What Lin calls "governing the state" and "nourishing life" refer to the phrase "governing people and serving heaven" in the main text of the *Laozi*. This chapter is meant to provide a discussion of how one should govern a state and preserve one's own life, but has nothing to say on how one should interact with what is self-so (heaven). Accordingly, "serving heaven" should be understood in Lin Xiyi's sense as meaning "nourishing life." In the chapter *Jin xin* 尽心 [*Fully Developing the Heart-mind*] of the *Mengzi* 孟子 [*Writings of Master Meng*] too there is the following passage: "Preserving the heart-mind and nourishing one's natural constitution (性), this is how heaven is served." This sentence provides convincing external evidence that nourishing life can be interpreted as "serving heaven." In Daoism, the focus of "nourishing life" lies on preserving the heart-mind and nourishing one's nature (preserving the spiritual and illuminating state of the original mind (本心) and sustaining the natural characteristics endowed by heaven).

2) *Se* 啬 [sparingly, miserly, to treasure]: To cherish, to take good care of.

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) comments: "In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] we read: '*Se* 啬 means *aise* 爱濇 [to cherish], derived from the characters *lai* 来 [wheat] and

1 Tr. note: Better known as the *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 [*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei*].

lin 亩 [granary]. Wheat is brought to the granary and stored. That is why a farmer (田夫) is called a *sefu* 啬夫 [hoarder, miser].' This makes it clear that *se* 啬 originally meant 'to store' and that its meaning was extended to the idea of cherishing something without using it. In the context of this passage, it means preserving one's spirit and body without putting them to use, in order to thereby return to a state of non-action (无为)."

3) *Zao* 早 [early] *fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out]: Here *fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out] has the same meaning as *bei* 备 [to prepare]. *Zao* 早 [early] *fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out] means to be prepared early (according to Ren Jiyu's 任继愈 (d. 2009) comments). In fact, *zao* 早 [early] *fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out] was recorded as *zao* 早 [early] *bei* 备 [to prepare] in the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] edition.

   Yao Nai 姚鼐 (d. 1815) notes: "*Fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out] means to deal with something. By being sparing, there will be plenty of time and enough power. Consequently, a person will be able to deal with something before it has happened and store up his efficacy, so that when something does happen, there is nothing that cannot be overcome."

   Lao Jian 劳健 (d. 1951) remarks: "*Zao* 早 [early] *fu* 服 [serve, obey, carry out] means to deal with something early."

4) *Chong* 重 [again, once more, to double, overlap] accumulating efficacy: Unceasingly accumulating "efficacy." "*Chong* 重" means "much" or "thick" here and has the sense of constantly increasing. "Efficacy" (德) refers to the "virtue" (德) of "being sparing and cherishing (啬)."

5) When the mother of possessing the state: "Possessing the state" refers to preserving the state. "Mother" is a metaphor for the Dao, fundamental for preserving the state.

6) Long life and lasting *shi* 视 [to see, sight]: To preserve something permanently, to exist for a long time. "To be seen for a long time (长视)" means to remain standing.

Contemporary Translation

In governing the state and taking care of one's body and mind, nothing is more important than cherishing one's vital energy.

To cherish one's vital energy is to be prepared early, being prepared early means to constantly accumulate efficacy, and if efficacy is constantly accumulated, there is nothing that cannot be shouldered. If there is nothing that

cannot be shouldered, then his power is unmeasurable. If his power is unmeasurable, then the responsibility of safeguarding the state can be taken on. By mastering the principle of governing the state, it can be preserved permanently. This is the foundational and deep-rooted principle of what exists enduringly and is established lastingly.

Argument

The concept of "being sparing and cherishing (嗇)" introduced by Laozi does not specifically refer to material belongings at all, but rather to the spiritual. "Being sparing and cherishing" means to maintain one's energy, to preserve the foundation, and to strengthen one's vitality.

This chapter provides us with the following thought-provoking saying: "What has deep roots and firm foundations is the Dao, is what lasts long and remains standing."

Sixty

治大國，若烹小鮮 (1)。

以道莅 (2) 天下，其鬼不神 (3)；非 (4) 其鬼不神，其鬼不傷人；非其鬼不傷人，聖人亦不傷人。夫兩不相傷 (5)，故德交歸焉 (6)。

Ordering a great state is like cooking a small *xian* 鮮 [fish, fresh animal flesh] (1).

Li 莅 [preside over, manage] (2) everything of this world according to the Dao (道), and spirits shall bring no influence (3); not only (4) spirits will not have influence, spirits will bring no harm to the people; not only spirits will bring no harm to the people, the sages will bring no harm to the people either. When the two both respectively do not bring harm (5), *de* 德 [efficacy, virtue] thus will return to its proper place (6).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Ordering a great state resembles cooking a small *xian* 鮮 [fish, fresh animal flesh]: "small *xian* 鮮" means small fish.

   Fu Shan 傅山 (d. 1684): "It means to not interfere in trivial matters."[1]

2) *Li* 莅 [to preside over, arrive]: Same as "*li* 涖 [to oversee, to preside over]," to attend. Here the variant of the character *li* 莅 [to oversee, to preside over] is the same as in Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271) edition. In the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] the character *li* 莅 [to preside over, to manage] is simplified into *li* 立 [to stand, to establish].

3) Spirits shall bring no influence: Spirits shall not function. The ancients often used the harmony and smooth interaction of yin-yang (阴阳) to explain prosperity of a country and peacefulness of the people, and they referred to the excess of *yin* 阴 energy as *gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit]. "*Shen* 神 [spiritual essence, to extend]" should be read as "*shen* 伸 [to stretch out, to extend]."

   Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "*Gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit] and *shen* 神 [spiritual essence, to extend] are the spirit (灵) of *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳). '*Gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit]' means to return; '*shen* 神' means to stretch out, to extend (伸). Zhang Zi 张子

1 Fu Shan 傅山, "*Du Laozi* 读老子 [*Reading the Laozi*]," in *Shuanghong kan ji* 霜红龛集 [*Collection from the Frosty Red Houselet*] (Taiyuan: Shanxi Renmin chubanshe, 1985), 860.

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[Zhang Zai 张载] (d. 1077) writes, 'Returning (鬼) and stretching out (神) are innate capacities of the two forces of the vital energy.' Zhu Wengong 朱文公 [Zhu Xi 朱熹] (d. 1200) writes, 'If we talk about the two forces of the vital energy, returning (鬼) is specific to the *yin* (阴) force, and stretching out (神) is specific to the *yang* (阳) force. If we talk about the vital essence *per se*, when it stretches out is *shen* 神 [spiritual essence, to extend], when it returns is *gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit, to return], but these are actually part of the same phenomenon.' Consequently, the sages follow the Dao (道) and act non-assertively, thus oversee the world, and the harmony and smooth interaction of yin (阴) and yang (阳) will take place, those that [are supposed to] return to the yin (阴) shall not stretch out to the yang (阳)."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "The character '*shen* 神 [spiritual essence, to extend]' is used in place of the character '*shen* 魖 [spirit, deity].' The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records, '*Shen* 魖 [spirit, deity] means *shen* 神 [spiritual essence, to extend], and has *gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit, to return] as semantic component, and *shen* 申 as pronunciation indicator.' Thus the *gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit, to return] force can be called *shen* 魖 [spirit, deity, spiritual essence, to extend]. If *gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit, to return] could not be called *shen* 魖 [spirit, deity, spiritual essence, to extend], it would be like saying that spirits are not efficacious."

4) *Fei* 非 [not only]: It stands for the phonetical fusion of the characters "*bu wei* 不唯 [not only]."[2]

5) The two both respectively do not bring harm: Indicates that *gui* 鬼 [revenant, evil spirit], *shen* 神 [spiritual essence, to extend], and the sages, all do not transgress and interfere with the people.

6) *De* 德 [efficacy, virtue] thus will return to its proper place: "*Jiao* 交", as commented by Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249), means altogether, jointly. "*Jiaogui* 交归" means to meet and return together/converge. The *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] records, "'*De* 德 [efficacy, virtue] will return to its proper place (德交归焉),' which means that *de* 德 [efficacy, virtue] from the upper or the lower will flourish together and converge on the people."

2 Cf. Gao Heng 高亨, *Laozi zhengu* 老子正诂 [*Correct Commentaries to the Laozi*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shuju, 1988), 126.

Contemporary Translation

Ordering a great state is like cooking a small fish.

When the Dao (道) is put into practice to govern the world, ghosts and evil spirits cannot exert their influence. Not only will ghosts and evil spirits not exert their influence, also deities and spirits will not transgress and interfere with the people. Not only will deities and spirits not transgress and interfere with the people, also the sages will not transgress and interfere with the people. Ghosts and spirits, and those who act according to the Dao (道), they all will not transgress and interfere with the people, and *de* 德 [efficacy, virtue] will converge on the people.

Argument

The aphorism "ordering a great state is like cooking a small fish" has greatly influenced Chinese traditional political thought. Metaphorically, it indicates that to govern a state one must remain still and not interfere, as interfering would harm the people. If a tyrannical government harms the people, disasters and calamities will come. If able to abide with "quiet tranquility and non-action (清静无为)", each and every person will be able to live in peace with one another.

This Chapter also eliminates the common idea of the influence of ghosts and spirits and explains how disasters and calamities all depend on people's actions. If people's actions are appropriate, then disasters and calamities will not occur.

Sixty-One

大邦者 (1) 下流，天下之牝，天下之交也 (2)。牝常靜勝牡，以靜爲下。

故大邦以下小邦，則取小邦；小邦以下大邦，則取大邦。故或下以取，或下而取 (3)。大邦不過欲兼畜人 (4)，小邦不過欲入事人。夫兩者各得所欲，大者宜爲下。

Great *bang* 邦 [states, feudal territories] (1) lay as underneath the water flow, feminine of this world, [where] everything of this world intersects (2). Inert, feminine ever overcomes masculine, being inert it stays low.

Great states stay lower than small states, thus enclose small states; smaller states stay under great states, thus please great states. Therefore, some stay lower in order to enclose, some stay lower in order to be enclosed (3). Great states wish no more than to unite and nurture the people (4), smaller states wish no more than to serve the people. Each and both fulfill what wished, it is advisable for the great ones to stay low.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Bang* 邦 [state, feudal territory]: In modern editions this character is *guo* 国 [state, kingdom], and here it has been amended according to the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)]

The following "*bang* 邦 [state, feudal territory]" have all been rectified on the basis of this *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*).

2) Feminine of this world, [where] everything of this world intersects: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) edition records, "[Where] everything of this world intersects, feminine of this world." Here the wording has been modified according to the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*).

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "'Feminine of this world' and '[where] everything of this world intersects' both stem from '*xia liu* 下流 [underneath the water flow],' so their meanings are parallel."

3) Some stay lower in order to enclose, some stay lower in order to be enclosed: "being lower (下)" refers to being modest (谦下). "*Qu* 取 [to take, to acquire]" replaces "*ju* 聚 [to collect, to gather together]." "*Yi qu* 以取" means in order to enclose, to gather others; "*er qu* 而取" means being enclosed, being gathered by others.

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All the four "*qu* 取 [to take, to acquire]" characters of this Chapter are intended as replacements for the character "*ju* 聚 [to collect, to gather together]". Gu Huan's 顾欢 (ca. d. 485) edition, the Kaiyuan era's 开元 (713–741) canon manuscript, the *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*], the edition of the *Daode zhenjing ci jie* 道德真经次解 [*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*], and Zhao Zhijian's 赵至坚 edition, all record the character "*ju* 聚 [to collect, to gather together]" instead of "*qu* 取 [to take, to acquire]."

Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979): "Thus for some [great states] being modest is to obtain the faith of small states, for some [small states] being modest is to receive the confidence of great states."

4) Unite and nurture the people: That is to say gather the people together and protect and nourish them, where "*jian* 兼" means to gather together, and "*xu* 畜" means to breed, to nurture.

Contemporary Translation

Great states must stay low as if at the lower reaches of a river, so located in this world's most gentle feminine position, where everything of this world flows together. The gentle and the feminine can win over the forceful and the masculine with its stillness and calmness because its stillness and its ability to stay low.

Therefore, if great states are humble towards small states, they can enclose small states; if small states are humble towards great states, they can be tolerated by great states. Thus in one case great states are humble in order to enclose small states, in another case small states are humble in order to be tolerated by great states. Great states want no more than to enclose and nourish small states, and small states ask no more than to be tolerated by great states. In this way, great states and small states all can fulfill their desires. Above all, great states must be humble.

Argument

Whether humankind can live in peace is dependent on great states' stance. The beginning and the conclusion of this chapter, "Great states lay as underneath the flow of water" and "the great ones shall be lower" both stress on the fact that great states must be humble and tolerant, and that they cannot count only on their greatness and power to surpass the small and weak states.

Besides "humility," Laozi also points out the stillness of the feminine, which is mentioned in opposition to restlessness. Restlessness, especially when driven by greed, easily originates aggressive behaviors.

Laozi perceived that his time states and feudal territories were all worshiping and/or showing off (尚) force and waging war recklessly, thus he appeals for humility and tolerance between states. Great states in particular must modestly avert struggles and only in this way can they obtain small states' trust and submission.

Sixty-Two

道者萬物之奧 (1)。善人之寶，不善人之所保 (2)。

美言可以市，尊行可以加人 (3)。人之不善，何棄之有？故立天子，置三公 (4)，雖有拱璧以先駟馬 (5)，不如坐進此道 (6)。

古之所以貴此道者何？ 不曰：求以得 (7)，有罪以免邪 (8)？故為天下貴。

The Dao is the vault of all things (1). Treasure of the good people, protection for the bad people (2).

Fine words can be traded, honorable deeds can improve common people (3). Why those whose conduct is bad should ever put it aside. Therefore, for establishing the son of Heaven, appointing the three highest minister-officials (4), even the presence of jade disc before four horses[1] (5), cannot compare with sitting and performing the Dao (6).

Why did the ancients treasure the Dao? Isn't it to say: what is sought can be obtained (7) and felons can expiate their crimes (8)? This is why it is the most precious of this world.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Ao* 奧 [southwest corner of a house,[2] inner recess]: This has the same meaning as *cang* 藏 [treasure, store, hide], which carries a sense of shelter or protection (庇荫). The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] record the character "*zhu* 注 [flow into, gather together]" instead of "*ao* 奧 [southwest corner of a house, inner recess]." This *zhu* 注 [flow into, gather together] should be understood as *zhu* 主 [that in a principal position, preside]. The *Li yun* 礼运 [*The Conveyance of Rites*] chapter of the *Yili* 仪礼 [*Book of Rites*] records "the people would look up [to the sages] as to their lords[3] (奧)" and thus "'*ao* 奧 [southwest corner of a house,

1 Tr. note: This is a description of the ceremony for establishing the son of Heaven and high-level minister-officials.

2 Tr. note: The southwest corner of a house was traditionally reserved for the most honored resident and it was also the place where sacrifices to spirits and household gods were held, suggesting a particularly prestigious place.

3 Max F. Müller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East vol. XXVII: The Texts of Confucianism part III. The Lî Kî, I–X*, trans. James Legge (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1885), 384.

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inner recess]' should be read as similar to '*zhu* 主 [that in a principal position, preside]'."[4]

Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) commentary records "'*ao* 奥 [southwest corner of a house, inner recess]' means *zang* 藏 [depository, treasury]."

Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): "'*Ao* 奥 [southwest corner of a house, inner recess]' is similar to *ai* 曖 [a place away from normal view, out of sight], so it can acquire the meaning of the word *biyin* 庇荫 [shade, protection]."

2) Protection for the bad people: This means that bad people should also maintain it.

Heshang Gong's commentary records, "'As regards the Dao,' bad people also should maintain and rely on it, since when it comes to disasters or in front of critical states, one naturally knows to regret and stay humble."

Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) edition, the Jinglong era stele manuscript, the edition of the *Daode zhenjing cijie* 道德真经次解 [*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*], and Zhao Zhijian's 赵至坚 edition all record "*bu bao* 不保 [to not keep, to not protect]" instead of "*bao* 保 [to keep, to protect]."

3) Fine words can be traded, honorable deeds can improve common people: Laudatory and beautiful words can be used in social exchange, valuable actions can be respected by people. "*Shi* 市 [trade, market]", here indicates trade or business transactions. "*Jia* 加 [improve, put into practice, adduce]" means to exert. "*Jia ren* 加人" means to exert influence over people.

Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): "[these] words express the treasure of good people. Good people rely on the Dao to gain respect among people, fine words are cherished as were the fine goods that can traded; outstanding behavior can set an example, [allowing] one to stand out above the multitude."

The received version records "Fine words can be traded, honorable deeds can improve people (美言可以市，尊行可以加人)." The *Daoying xun* 道应训 [*Responses of Dao*] and the *Renjian xun* 人间训 [*In the World of Men*] chapters of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] quote, "Fine words can be used to purchase respect (美言可以市尊), fine deeds can be used to improve people (美行可以加人)." Both Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907) and Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) accept the version from the *Huainanzi* as the one to follow. Nevertheless, reading the *Mawangdui Silk*

4 Cf. the explanatory text to the *Laozi* 老子 *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk manuscript* (*text A*)] by the Mawangdui Silk Books Researching Group.

Manuscripts, one finds the exact same text as Wang Bi's version and other ancient versions. "The intention of these two sentences lies in the depreciation of 'fine words (美言)' and the praise of '(*zun xing* 尊行),' which proves that the [received] text is correct."[5]

4) Three Dukes: The Grand Teacher (太师), the Grand Mentor (太傅), and the Grand Guardian (太保).

5) The jade disc before four horses: The "jade disc" being prior to the "team of four horses" indicates an archaic offering rite procedure.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) (d. 1974): "In ancient times, offerings [were sequenced] with light objects being offered first and heavier objects after. 'The jade disc before four horses' means [the offering of] the jade disc being presented earlier than [that of] the team of four horses."

6) Cannot compare with sitting and performing the Dao: Cannot compare with offering the Dao.

7) What is sought can be obtained (求以得): Having requests and satisfying them.

Wang Bi's edition records "*yi qiu de* 以求得". The Jinglong era stele, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) edition, the *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*], Yan Zun's edition, Gu Huan's 顾欢 (ca. d. 485) edition, the version in the *Jingdian shiwen* 经典释文 [*Annotations to the Classics*], Li Yue's 李约 (ca. d. 810) edition, Lu Xisheng's 陆希声 (d. 895) edition, Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112) edition, Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (ca. d. 1271) edition, Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) edition, Wu Cheng's edition, and numerous other ancient manuscripts all record "*qiu yi* 求以" instead of "*yi qiu* 以求", exactly as in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*. Therefore, the text here has been amended on the basis of these editions.

Yu Yue: "The Jinglong era stele edition and Fu Yi's edition both record '*qiu yi de* 求以得 [what is sought can be obtained],' which form a symmetrical couple with '*you zui yi mian* 有罪以免 [felons can expiate their crimes],' therefore this is the one to follow."

8) Felons can expiate their crimes: This sentence is the explanation of the previous 'protection for the bad people (不善人之所保)', which means that criminals, having obtained the Dao can be absolved of or be excused for their past crimes. Therefore, even criminals should maintain and hold on to the Dao.

5 Cf. Huang Zhao 黄钊, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu xi* 帛书老子校注析 [*Analysis of Collated Annotations to the Laozi Silk Manuscripts*] (Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1991).

Contemporary Translation

The Dao is the shelter and protection of all things. Good people treasure it, bad people also hold on to it.

Laudatory and beautiful words can be used in socializing, praiseworthy and valuable actions can receive respect from people. How can bad people give up on the Dao? Therefore, instating the son of Heaven, putting up the three highest minister-officials, even the rite of offering the round jade disc first and the four horses after cannot compare with the offering of Dao [namely, one embodies the Dao].

In ancient times, what was the reason for cherishing the Dao? Is it not because any request can be satisfied and criminals can be excused for their crimes? Therefore, it is valued and esteemed by all the people of this world.

Argument

This chapter expands the significance of the Dao. The son of Heaven and the three highest minister-officials possess the round jade disc and four horses, but nevertheless this is not as important as adhering to the Dao.

Sixty-Three

無為事，事無為，味無味 (1)。
大小多少 (2)，[報怨以德 (3)。] 圖難於其易，為大於其細；天下難事，必作於易，天下大事，必作於細。是以聖人終不為大 (4)，故能成其大。
夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難。是以聖人猶難之，故終無難矣。

Non-actions actions, engage in a non-active way, savor the savorless (1).

Great small, many few (2), [requite enmity with *de* 德 [obtain, virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] (3).] Estimate (图)[1] difficulties out of their simplicity, take (为) the grand out of minuteness; difficult matters of this world originate within the easy, grand matters of this world originate within the minute. In this way sages never contrive the great (4), thus are able to accomplish their greatness.

Light promises are inevitably untrustworthy, the too easy is inevitably more difficult. In this way sages are cautious and consider things as difficult, thus never face difficulties.

Commentary and Explanation

1) Savor the savorless: Consider that which is without flavor to be flavorful.

Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): "[…] Taking the mild as flavorful is the extreme of [politically] ordering [a state] (治之极也)."

2) Great small, many few: The great originates from the small, the many commences from the few.[2] The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version records this phrase as "*da xiao zhi* 大小之 [the grand and the minute]," and the subsequent part "*duo yi bi duo nan* 多易必多难 [the too easy is inevitably more difficult]" is also not consistent with the various versions followed here.

The received version records "*Da xiao duo shao* 大小多少 [great small, many few]" and, because its meaning is not completely clear, Yao Nai 姚鼐 (d. 1815) and others suspect that some characters might be missing.

1 Tr. note: "*Tu* 图" translated here as "estimate" also connotes effort to actually bring something about (in practice).

2 Cf. Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰, *Laozi dajie* 老子达解 [*Comprehensive Interpretation of the Laozi*] (Taibei: Huanzheng shuju, 2008), 325–330.

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Yao Nai writes: "After the four characters '*da xiao duo shao* 大小多少 [great small, many few]', some characters are missing and the meaning should not be forced." Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) writes: "The meaning of the phrase '*da xiao duo shao* 大小多少 [great small, many few]' cannot be asserted. I suspect that some strips are missing before and after it." Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) argues: "The meaning cannot be fully explained because the text is corrupted."

There are a few ways to explain the phrase "*da xiao duo shao* 大小多少 [great small, many few]." The first is "the great is regarded as small, and the many is regarded as few." Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "People of this world consider official ranks and wealth as greatness (大) and abundance (多), so they seek them. Contrarily, 'Dao (道)' concerns the empty and the minuscule, it does not concern fame and wealth and is devoid of content, which all can be regarded as minute (小) and 'few' (少). The sages forsake merit and fame, which means they depart from greatness and abundance while accomplishing minuteness and the 'few'." This is to say that the sages and the common people have different value perspectives. The second way to understand this phrase, is to consider the minute as great, and the few as the numerous. Gao Xiang 高亨 (d. 1986) analyzes as follows: "Regarding 'the great and the minute' (大小), the great is the minute, thus the minute can be referred to as the great. As for the numerous and the few (多少), the numerous is the few, and the few can be referred to as the numerous. Seeing a single spark and saying it will be the origin of a [huge] fire, watching sluggish and gentle waters, and saying that they will flood a town, this is what it means to be cautious." The third way of understanding this is explained by Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) who writes: "Those who are able to seek the great must be able to reach the minute, those who are able to seek the numerous must be able to reach the few."

On the basis of the *Yu Lao* 喻老 [*Illustration of the Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*], Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) writes, "the great originates from the minuscule, the numerous originates from the few,"[3] which echoes the meaning of the subsequent sentence: "estimate difficulties out of their simplicity, consider the grand out of its minuteness."

3) Requite enmity with *de* 德 [obtain, virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]: This sentence seems to be disconnected from its context. Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) argues that it should be put before the part "When a great resentment has been assuaged (和大怨)" of Chapter 79, and Yan

3 Yan, *Laozi dajie*, 325–330.

Lingfeng believes that it should be placed after the sentence "there will necessarily be residual resentment (必有餘怨)" of the same Chapter. Here we will insert it in Chapter 79 as suggested by Yan Lingfeng.[4]

4) Never contrive the great: They do not consider themselves as grand.

Contemporary Translation

Adopt a non-action attitude to your actions, adopt a non-interfering approach to doing things, consider the mild as flavorful.

The great originates from the small, the numerous emerges from the few, [use *de* (德) to respond to animosity.] Solving difficulties must commence from the simple, achieving the great must commence from the minuscule. The difficult matters in this world must be dealt with from dealing with the easy ones. The grand events of this world must be dealt with through dealing with the minute ones. Therefore, those who master Dao (道) never consider themselves as grand, and this is why they can accomplish great things.

Easy promises inevitably will be broken. Considering matters as too simple will surely bring more difficulties. Therefore, sages always look at things as if they were complicated, and this is why, eventually, they do not face difficulties.

Argument

"Non-action actions", i.e. being in accordance with the objective conditions, thus not subjectively forcing any rash actions, is the direction for ordering the world that Laozi repeatedly points out.

As regards small, great, difficult, and easy problems, Daoism prompts numerous insightful conceptions. Laozi records: "The Dao is great" (Chapter 25) and "to see the small is called *ming* 明 [bright, clarity] (见小曰明) (Chapter 52)", which means that both small and big should be taken into account. In the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] we read: "When from the standpoint of what is minute we look at what is great, we have an incomplete vision; when from the standpoint of what is great we look at what is minute, we do not see it clearly." Laozi states "In the *yu* 域 [region, area, domain], there are four greats (域中有四大)" (Chapter 25) and "Thus, the *dao* is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Man is also great" (Chapter 25). Here, while simultaneously opening up the field of vision of human thought and elevating human

4 Cf. note 1 of Chapter 79.

spiritual space, it indicates that people need to discover "*wei* 微 [minute, subtle] *ming* 明 [bright, obvious, revealing]" (Chapter 36), the great Dao and the principles of actions and affairs, which are normally "hidden," "obscure," and "ever so faint." They need to know the imperceptible to be able to experience flavor, and see the most minute to have penetrating insight.

Similarly, difficult problems are closely connected with what attitude one should adopt. Laozi reminds people that when dealing with difficult matters, they need to start from the easiest elements. When facing easy matters, they must not lower their guard. "Consider them as difficult" is a cautious way to approach a problem which involves careful thoughts and careful actions. The various sayings in this chapter, whether from practical or more theoretical positions, constitute an unchanging high pattern or principle (至理).

Sixty-Four

其安易持 (1)，其未兆易謀。其脆易泮 (2)，其微 (3) 易散。爲之於未有，治之於未亂。

合抱之木，生於毫末 (4)；九層之臺，起於累土 (5)；千里之行，始於足下。

爲者敗之，執者失之，是以聖人無爲故無敗；無爲執故無失 (6)。

民之從事，常於幾成而敗之。慎終如始，則無敗事。

是以聖人欲不欲，不貴難得貨；學不學 (7)，復眾人之所過，以輔萬物之自然而不敢爲。

It stable it is easy to keep one's grip (1), when something has not happened yet it is easy to plan. When something is brittle it is easy to break (2), when something is *wei* 微 [minute, imperceptible] (3) it is easy to disperse. Deal with something when it has not taken place, bring it under control when it has not turned turbulent.

A tree that one has to embrace with two arms grew from the most tender sprout (4); a building of nine levels rises from *lei* 累 [accumulate, pile, repeat] *tu* 土 [earth, clay, unsophisticated] (5); a journey of a thousand *li*[1] starts under one foot.

Those who act fail, those who control lose, this is why the sages [practice] non-action (无为) and thus do not fail, they do not control things thus not lose (6).

When people engage in something, they normally fail just on the very brink of success. Being cautious at the end like at the beginning, thus they will not fail in things.

This is why the sages desire to have no desires, do not value things that are difficult to obtain; they *xue* 学 [study, model, imitate] not *xue* 学 [study, model, imitate] (7) and return to what the common people have missed, help to bring about the self-so[ness] of all things and not hazarding to act on them.

Commentary and Explanation

1) It stable it is easy to keep one's grip: The chapter comes as transcribed here on the basis of the *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*],

1 Tr. note: A traditional unit of length roughly equal to 500 meters.

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but the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version had divided the texts in two separate chapters: the first one is from "When things are stable it is easy to maintain (其安易持)" to "a journey of a thousand *li* starts under one foot (千里之行，始于足下)," and the second one is from "Those who act fail (为者败之)" to "assist/facilitate/help to bring about the self-so[ness] of all things and not hazarding to act on them (以辅万物自然而不敢为)." The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* version records each chapter individually, and the chapter numbers are not successive.

2) When something is brittle it is easy to break: Things that are fragile are easy to break.

Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) edition, Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) edition, and Jiao Hong's 焦竑 (d. 1620) edition, all record "*pan* 判 [divide in two, discriminate]" instead of "*pan* 泮 [break apart, dissolve]". In ancient times these two characters were interchangeable. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records "pan 判 means *fen* 分 [divide, discriminate]."

Henshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) edition, the Jinglong era stele version, the *Dunhuang* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] version, Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) edition, Gu Huan 顾欢 (ca. d. 485) edition, Li Yue's 李约 (ca. d. 810) edition, Lu Xisheng's 陆希声 (d. 895) edition, Chen Jingyuan's 陈景元 (d. 1094) edition, Lü Huiqing's 吕惠卿 (d. 1111) edition, Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (ca. d. 1271) edition, and other ancient manuscripts all record "*po* 破 [crush, assail]" instead of "*pan* 泮 [break apart, dissolve]."

3) *Wei* 微 [minute, imperceptible]: The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* records the character "*ji* 几 [infinitesimal, latent]." The *Shuowen jiezi* explains: "*Ji* 几 [infinitesimal, latent] means *wei* 微 [minute, imperceptible]." Moreover, in the *Xici* 系辞 [*On the Relationship of the Hexagrams*] chapter of the *Yi zhuan* 易传 [*Commentaries to the Book of Changes*] we read, "Know the infinitesimal (知几)" and "study deeply the profound and investigate thoroughly the infinitesimal (极深研几)." "*Ji* 几 [infinitesimal, latent]" is an important concept in pre-Qin philosophy and, perhaps, it originated from the study of the *Laozi*.

4) The most tender sprout: It indicates the tiny sprout [of a plant].

5) *Lei* 累 [accumulate, pile, repeat] *tu* 土 [earth, clay, unsophisticated]: These two characters can be interpreted in two ways. The first is as "lowland." Hanshang Gong comments, "From low (卑) to high (高)," where *bei* 卑 [low, decline] means "lowland." Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) writes, "*lei* 累 [accumulate, pile, repeat] *tu* 土 [earth, clay, unsophisticated] indicates the lowest part of the terrain." The second way is as "a pile of soil." Lin Xiyi writes "a basket of soil." Gao Xiang 高亨 (d. 1986) writes, "'*lei*

累' should be understood as '*lei* 纍', which means a basket used to carry earth, or a gabion. Hence, I suspect that the sentence *qi yu lei tu* 起于累土 means "it raises from a straw sack of earth." A gabion is a utensil used in construction to carry earth, therefore "*lei* 累 [accumulate, pile, repeat] *tu* 土 [earth, clay, unsophisticated]" means a basket of earth.

6) Those who act fail, those who control lose, this is why the sages [practice] non-action (无为) and thus do not fail, they do not control things thus not lose: This part does not fit the context, raising doubts as to whether it belongs to another section. Note: The *Guodian Bamboo Slips* considers all the text after "Those who act fail" as a new chapter. Because the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* is different from other versions and present characters in different styles, philologists have divided them into Group A, Group B, and Group C. In terms of content, these three groups normally do not overlap but, as regards this chapter, we find the same parts repeated in Group A and Group C but with a slightly different wording, suggesting that they come from different transmitted codices.

7) *xue* 学 [study, model, imitate] not *xue* 学 [study, model, imitate]: Group A of the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* records "*Jiao* 教 [teach, instruct] not *jiao* 教 [teach, instruct]," which is to say, as was pointed out by Wei Qipeng 魏启鹏 (b. 1942), that they follow the example of the Great Dao (大道) that cannot be followed.

Contemporary Translation

In a stable situation, it is easy to maintain personal integrity, and it is easy to plan when incidents have not happened yet. It easy to break things when they are brittle, and it is easy to scatter things when they are very small. It is necessary to prepare in advance before events take place, and it is necessary to adopt appropriate measures before turmoil occurs.

A giant tree grows from the tiniest sprout; a building of nine levels is built starting from a single basket of earth; a trip of ten thousand *li* starts with a single step.

When doing things and are about to succeed, common people often fail. When things are almost done, but they still act in a cautious way, like they have just begun, then they will not fail.

Rushing things recklessly leads to failure, insisting on controlling things also leads to failure. This is why those with the Dao do not act in a rush thus do not lose, do not try to control thus do not lose.

When doing things and about to succeed, common people often face failure, whereas if cautious till the end as during the beginning, they will not lose.

Thus those who have the Dao desire for what common people do not desire, and do not value those goods that are difficult to obtain; they study what common people do not study, remedy to people's mistakes and, facilitate the natural changes of all things without interposing themselves.

Argument

The meaning of the first half of this chapter is integral and coherent. Its main ideas can be summarized as follows:

1. Pay attention to the origin of calamities. prevent disasters and turmoil before they take place.
2. Everything starts from being small, and then becomes bigger, from being near, then becomes distant. Groundwork is crucial, which is to say, "A tree that one has to embrace with two arms grew from the most tender sprout; a building of nine levels rises from one heap of earth; a journey of a thousand *li* starts under one foot." Distant and grand things require willpower and patience to be carried out one step at a time, and if one's predisposition is just a little bit indolent, then it is likely to fall short of success for the lack of a final effort.

Sixty-Five

古之善為道者，非以明 (1) 民，將以愚 (2) 之。

民之難治，以其智多 (3)。故以智治國，國之賊；不以智治國，國之福。

知此兩者 (4) 亦稽式 (5)。常如稽式，是謂“玄德”，玄德深矣，遠矣，與物反矣 (6)，然後乃至大順 (7)。

Those of the past able to practice the Dao, did not use it to *ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious] (1) the people, but they used it to make them *yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid] (2).

The people are difficult to govern because their *zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge] are *duo* 多 [various, many] (3). Therefore, using *zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge] to govern a state brings misfortune to the state. Not using *zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge] to govern a state brings fortune to the state.

Discerning the two [approaches] (4) *yi* 亦 [too, also, likewise] *ji* 稽 [bow, kowtow] *shi* 式 [model, method, pattern] (5), and knowing the *ji* 稽 [bow, kowtow] *shi* 式 [model, method, pattern] is what is called “*xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power].” How deep! How distant is *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power]! *Yu* 与 [and, give, take part] *wu* 物 [things, affairs] *fan* 反 [return, reverse] *yi* 矣 [final particle] (6), in this way the great *shun* 顺 [flow, obedience, along, principle] will be reached (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious]: Ingenious.

Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): “*Ming* 明 refers to the frequent exposure to something ingenious and tricky, which blocks one’s simplicity.”

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown): “*Ming* 明 means knowing the ingenious and tricky.”

2) *Yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid]: Honest, unsophisticated, simple.

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Wang Bi: "'*Yu* 愚 [unsophisticated, ignorant]' refers to *wu-zhi* 无知 [no understanding, a type of ignorance]; here it means to hold to the genuine and conform to the self-so."

Heshang Gong: "Let them be simple and natural without deceiving [one another]."

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "The expression '*jiang yi yu zhi* 将以愚之 [used it to make them ignorant/stupid]' means to not divert from honesty and to not let any ingenuous trick develop. Therefore, what is meant by '*yu zhi* 愚之 [make the people ignorant/stupid]' is not to deceive, but that there is no need for any farfetched interpretations regarding selfish intention in order to guide them due to their natural states."

Gao Yihan 高一涵 (d. 1968): "Why can we say that Laozi's political philosophy criticizes his contemporary socio-political circumstances? It is because he saw a time of continuous war when the common people were running from pillar to post that he advocated for dismissing the army. It is because he saw there was too much of a gap between the poor and the rich that he advocated valuing being economical. It is because he saw that his time was dominated by despots and corrupted officials who were treating common people as if there were of no importance that he advocated non-action (无为); it is because he saw that ingenuity and deception were updated with each passing day that he advocated simple stupidity (愚). These four exhortations—dismiss the army, frugality, non-action actions, and simple stupidity (愚)—indeed constitute the key to Laozi's ideal society."[1]

Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979): "He (Laozi) wished people to be as simple and stupid (愚) as he was, to eliminate all the world classes, and accomplish the great equality that cancels out the distinction between (external) things and myself in order to, in this way, diminish the various disagreements and disputes among the people."[2]

3) *Zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge] *duo* 多 [various, many]: This means sundry artfulness and trickery.

Wang Bi: "Sundry artfulness and trickery."

Fan Yingyuan: "Not abiding by nature, but considering selfish intentions and farfetched interpretations as [the qualities] of being bright. This is what is commonly called *zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge]."

1 Gao Yihan 高一涵, "Laozi de zhengzhi zhexue 老子的政治哲学 [*The Political Philosophy of the Laozi*]," *Xin qinnian zazhi* 新青年杂志 [*La Jeunesse*] 6, No. 5 (May 1919): 542–548.

2 Zhang Mosheng 张默生, *Laozi* 老子 (*Laozi*) (Shanghai: Dongfang shushe, 1948), 60.

Xu Fuguan 徐复观 (d. 1982): "*Zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge] *duo* 多 [various, many] means excessive desires. Excessive desires ferment conflicts that cause mutual perils. Laozi always believed that the cause of people's badness was the rulers' negative influence. The excessive desires of the people were also because of the negative influence of the rulers."

In the Jing Long era stele version and the *Dunhuang Xin* 敦煌辛 [*Dunhuang Xin Manuscript*] version the phrase "*Zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge] *duo* 多 [various, many]" was recorded as "*duo* 多 [various, many] *zhi* 智 [intelligence, wisdom, knowledge]."

4) Discerning the two [approaches]: This refers to the aforementioned "using ingenuity to govern a state brings misfortune to the state; not using ingenuity to govern a state brings fortune to the state."

5) *Yi* 亦 [too, also, likewise] *ji* 稽 [bow, kowtow] *shi* 式 [model, method, pattern]: "*Yi* 亦 [too, also, likewise]" means *nai* 乃 [be, only then][3] and "*nai* 乃 [be, only then]" means to be. "*Ji* 稽 [bow, kowtow] *shi* 式 [model, method, pattern]" means model, method, principle, or norm (法则).

The Jing Long era stele version, the *Dunhuang Xin* and *Ren* manuscripts, Heshang Gong's, Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485), Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271), and other ancient versions, all record "*kai* 楷 [model, pattern] *shi* 式 [model, method, pattern]" instead of "*ji* 稽 [bow, kowtow] *shi* 式 [model, method, pattern]."

6) *Yu* 与 [and, give, take part] *wu* 物 [things, affairs] *fan* 反 [return, reverse] *yi* 矣 [final particle]: There are two interpretations. First, "*fan* 反 [return, reverse]" refers to being opposite, and hence "*de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power]" is interpreted as the opposite of the nature of things. Heshang Gong comments: "The person of *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power] is different from the myriad things; the myriad things desire to benefit themselves, [the person of] *xuan* 玄 [dark, mysterious] *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power] provides for others." Second, "*fan* 反 [return, reverse]" is understood as a loanword for "*fan* 返 [return, go back]." Then "*de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, virtue, power]" and all the things return to genuineness and simplicity. Wang Bi comments: "Return to its genuineness," thus return to genuineness and simplicity. Lin Xiyi comments: "'*Fan* 反 [return, reverse]' means recover,

3 Pei Xuehai 裴学海, *Gushi xuzi jishi* 古书虚字集释 [*Collected Explanations for Function Words in Ancient Works*] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1996), 175.

return, to return with all things for the sake of the initial state (初)." "*Chu* 初 [originally, initial]" refers to the state of being genuine and simple.

7) Great *shun* 顺 [flow, obedience, along, principle]: Self-so (自然).

Lin Xiyi: "Great *shun* 顺 [flow, obedience, along, principle] is self-so (自然)."

Contemporary Translation

In the past those who were good at practicing the Dao did not teach the people to be sophisticated, but enabled them to be sincere.

The reason why it is difficult to govern the people lies in that they rely too much on intelligence and acumen. Hence, governing a state through ingenuity brings misfortune to the state, whereas governing a state not relying on ingenuity, brings fortune to the state.

Being able to discern this is the principle of governance. Constantly recognizing this principle is what is called "dark efficacy (玄德)." How deep and distant is dark efficacy (玄德)! Only by going back with all things to genuine simplicity and honesty is it possible to reach the greatest flow.

Argument

This chapter emphasizes that governance lies in genuineness and simplicity. Laozi believes that good or bad governance is determined by the rulers' own intentions and methods. Only if rulers are genuine and sincere will they implement good and decent governance, and only through decent governance will society be peaceful. On the other hand, if rulers are sly and scheming, their governance will be a corrupted one. In a situation of corrupt governance, people will swindle and harm each other and society will have no peace. In light of this consideration, Laozi expects the ruler to guide the people by genuineness and simplicity.

Laozi lived in a time of turmoil, and came to realize that the root of turmoil is the battle of wits and intelligence, competition, and hypocrisy, therefore he appeals to the people to renounce disputes over mundane values and to go back to genuineness and simplicity. It is within the context of his chaotic times that Laozi addressed this critical discourse.

The theme of this chapter has been generally mistaken by later generations who read it as Laozi advocating for obscurantist policies (愚民政策). However, the *yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupid] intended by

Laozi, actually means genuineness and simplicity. He not only expects the people to be genuine and simple, but he requires the rulers in particular to pursue genuineness and simplicity for the sake of self-cultivation. Therefore, in Chapter 20 there is "my heart is truly that of a fool (我愚人之心也哉)," which indicates that genuineness and simplicity (愚) belong to the superior state of self-cultivation of an ideal ruler.

Sixty-Six

江海之所以能爲百穀王 (1) 者，以其善下之，故能爲百穀王。

是以聖人 (2) 欲上民，必以言下之；欲先民，必以身後之。是以聖人處上而民不重 (3)，處前而民不害。是以天下樂推 (4) 而不厭。以其不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。

What capacitates all rivers and seas to be the *wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] of *bai gu* 百谷 [the hundred gullies] (1) is that they are good at staying low, thus are able to be the *wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] of *bai gu* 百谷 [the hundred gullies].

Therefore (是以), if the *shengren* 圣人 [the sage] (2) wishes to above the people, he must speak with humility. If [the sage] wishes to ahead of the people, he must put himself last. The sage stays above and the people do not feel the *zhong* 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave] (3), stays ahead and the people not suffer. Hence, everything in this world gladly commend [him] (4) and do not object because he does not contend, thus nothing in this world will contend with him.

Commentary and Explanation

1) The *wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] of *bai gu* 百谷 [the hundred gullies]: Indicates to where all the rivers return.

"*Bai gu* 百谷 [the hundred gullies]" designates all rivers. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: "Springs that flow to rivers are called *gu* 谷 [gullies, spring]," thus "*bai gu* 百谷 [the hundred gullies]" should be understood as all rivers.

Regarding "*wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule]", the *Shuowen jiezi* records "*Wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] is where everything of this world returns." Therefore "*wang* 王" here means returning.

2) *Shengren* 圣人 [the sage]: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) edition lacks these two characters.

The Jinglong era stele version, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639), Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) versions, other ancient versions, as well as the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] all record these two characters after "therefore (是以)." Consequently, they are added on the basis of the various ancient versions/editions in accordance with the hermeneutic regulations/norms.

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Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "The *editio princeps* of the *Dao zang* 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*] does record the two characters '*shengren* 圣人 [the sage]', thus we can mend [the text] accordingly."

3) *Zhong* 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave]: Means feeling burdened or that one cannot endure.

Gao Xiang 高亨 (d. 1986): "What is conveyed by the character *zhong* 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave] in the text is that the great burden (累) the people feel when supporting their rulers is like a heavy load. Therefore, *zhong* 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave] is the same as *lei* 累 [feeling burdened, tired]. Conversely, if the people do not have anything that weights on them (重), then they do not feel burdened (累). In the poem *Wu jiang da che* 无将大车 [*Don't Push the Ox-drawn Cart*] of the *Shijing* 诗经 [*Classic of Poetry*] we read: 'Do not think about all your sorrow, you will only burden yourself (无思百忧，只自重兮).' Zheng Xuan 郑玄 (d. 200) annotates: '*Zhong* 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave] is like *lei* 累 [feeling burdened, tired].' In the *Jing Yan Wu wang zhuan* 荆燕吴王传 [*Biographies of Princes of Jing, Yan, and Wu*] chapter of the *Han shu* 汉书 [*Book of the Han*] we read: 'Matters/tasks start piling on each other (事发相重),' to which Yan Shigu 颜师古 (d. 645) comments, '*Zhong* 重 [heavy, something that weights on one, grave] is the same as *lei* 累 [feeling burdened, tired].' This validates the interpretation as '*lei* 累 [feeling burdened, tired]'."

4) *Le tui* 乐推 [gladly commend]: The *Guodian jian* 郭店简 [*Guodian Bamboo Slips*] version records "*le jin* 乐进 [gladly hold in esteem]." The meaning in the received version is better.

Contemporary Translation

The reason why big rivers [or the Yangtze] and seas can become the place to which all rivers flow, is because they are good at occupying a lower position and, therefore, they can be where all rivers flow.

Therefore, if the sage wishes to be the people's leader, he must be honestly modest towards them. If he wishes to be the people's example, he must put his personal interests after those of the people. This is why when the sage occupies the highest position the people do not feel oppressed, and when he occupies a leading position the people do not feel victimized. This is why all the people in this world gladly support him and do not object. It is because he does not contend with the people that there is no one in this world who wants to contend with him.

Argument

When rulers have the power in their hands it is easy to cause an oppressive feeling to the people, and as soon as they recklessly act wildly and illegally, then the people can no longer endure the burden. It is on this basis that this Chapter points out that those in higher positions must try to avoid bringing burdens and causing harm to the people.

Since Laozi deeply perceived that those in the highest positions were powerful, arrogant, and oppressed the people, and that those in leading positions put their interests first and caused great damage to the people, he awakens those in power to be humble and yield. This conveys the same aforementioned notion of "not contending" (see Chapter 8 and Chapter 22).

The opening of this Chapter proposes the image of big rivers and seas as a metaphor which, in terms of meaning, resembles the one in Chapter 32 when we read "Compared, the Dao is to the human realm as stream valleys are to rivers and oceans (譬道之在天下，犹川谷之于江海)." Laozi likes using metaphors involving big rivers and seas to express one's humility while, at the same time, they symbolize people's tolerance and magnanimity.

Sixty-Seven

[天下皆謂我:"'道' 大，似不肖。" 夫唯大，故似不肖。若肖，久矣其細也夫！(1)]
我有三寶，持而保之。一曰慈，二曰儉 (2)，三曰不敢爲天下先。
慈故能勇 (3)；儉故能廣 (4)；不敢爲天下先，故能成器長 (5)。
今舍慈且 (6) 勇；舍儉且廣；舍後且先；死矣！
夫慈，以戰則勝 (7)，以守則固。天將救之，以慈衛之。

[The entire world is telling me, "The Dao is great but seems to be not *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble]." It is only because of its greatness that it appears not *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble]. If it were *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble], it would have been minute for a long time now! (1)]

I have three treasures to guard and protect. The first is called loving-kindness, the second is called *jian* 俭 [frugality] (2), the third is called not daring to be ahead of the world.

Loving-kindness thus to be able to be brave (慈故能勇) (3); frugality thus be able to be broad (俭故能广) (4); not daring to be ahead of the world thus be able to become *Qi zhang* 器长 [utensil chief] (5).

Now, abandoning loving-kindness *qie* 且 [and) (6) being courageous, abandoning frugality and being broad; abandoning to step back and being ahead: this means death!

Loving-kindness, if used in military campaigns will lead to triumph (以战则胜) (7), if used to guard will lead to reinforcement. If Heaven wants to aid, it will guard by using loving-kindness.

Commentary and Explanation

1) [The entire world is telling me, "The Dao is great but seems to be not *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble]." It is only because of its greatness that it appears not *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble]. If it were *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble] it would have been minute for a long time now]. Chapter 67 focuses on the concept of "loving-kindness" and in terms of content, this part seems to not fit with the subsequent texts, thus, I suspect that this part belongs to another chapter [and was relocated here due to] the mistranscription of the bamboo slips. The contemporary translation of this part is "Everyone in the world says to me: Dao is grand and vast, and it is not like anything concrete. That is to say that because it is grand and vast, it is not like

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anything concrete. If it was, it would have already been trifling!" The opening sentence [of this chapter] in the received version records the character *dao* 道 [Dao] before *da* 大 [grand, vast], whereas the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] and Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version do not. The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] records, "The entire world calls me great, great and yet not *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble]. It is only because not *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble] that can therefore be great. If really like *xiao* 肖 [small, resemble], would have been minute for a long time now (天下皆谓我大，大而不肖。夫唯不肖，故能大。若肖，久矣其细也夫)."

2) *Jian* 俭 [frugality]: This means having but not using up. It is a synonym of *se* 啬 [frugality, parsimonious] in Chapter 59.

   Hu Jichuang 胡寄窗 (d. 1996): "Even if Laozi's notion of discarding prodigality and practicing frugality does not present any specific features if compared with the ideas of other pre-Qin schools of thought. The fact that it is mentioned does at least reflect Laozi's opposition to the indulgent extravagance and the cruel exploitation of the people by the aristocracy of his time."[1]

3) Loving-kindness thus be able to be brave (慈故能勇): Because of loving-kindness one can be brave. This expression conveys the same principle of Mengzi's "the benevolent has no enemy (仁者无敌)."

   Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "The meaning of '*yong* 勇 [courage, courageously]' here intended, is the courage of being humble and retiring and of defending, not the courage of struggling or being aggressive. 'Loving-kindness thus be able to be brave (慈故能勇)', therefore means that only if the sage possesses loving-kindness, then the soldiers will have the courage to defend."

4) Frugal thus be able to be broad (俭故能广): Because of frugality one can be wealthy and broad.

   The *Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining Laozi*] chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*] records, "If wise men frugally utilize their wealth, their families will become rich; if the sages treasure their spirit, their energy will become abundant; and if the rulers of people emphasize the usefulness of their soldiers for military purposes, then their subjects will become numerous. If the subjects are numerous, the state will become vast."

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1 Hu Jichuang 胡寄窗, *Zhongguo jingji sixiang shi* 中国经济思想史 [*History of Chinese Economic Thought*] (Shanghai: Shanghai University of Finance and Economics Press, 2013), vol. 1, 210.

Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) comments, "Be frugal and thrifty, and spare with expenses, the world will see no scarcity, so [it] can be abundant/wide/broad."

5) *Qi zhang* 器长 [utensil chief): The leader of all things. Here "*qi* 器 [utensil, vessel]" means "*wu* 物 [things, living beings]," and refers to all things (万物).
6) *Qie* 且 [and): It stands for the character *qu* 取 [to acquire, demand].
7) If used in military campaigns will lead to triumph (以戰則勝): Fu Yi and Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) editions record "If used for military deployment it will lead to proper ordering (以陈则正)". Fan Yingyuan writes "*Chen* 陈 [arrange, deployment of troops] should be read as *zhen* 阵 [military formation, battleground], which indicates the military arrangement."

Contemporary Translation

I have three treasures, to guard and keep safe. The first one is called pursuing loving-kindness, the second is called pursuing frugality, the third one is called not daring to stand ahead of the people of this world.

Because of loving-kindness one can be brave; because of frugality one can be wealthy and broad; because of not daring to get ahead of the people of this world, one can be become the leader of everything of this world.

At the present moment, giving up on loving-kindness but demanding courage, giving up on frugality but demanding broadness, giving up on stepping back but demanding to be the first, is like walking the path towards a dead end!

Loving-kindness, if used in military campaigns will lead to triumph, if used to guard will lead to reinforcement. If Heaven wants to save someone, it will do so by using loving-kindness to keep them safe.

Argument

The three treasures mentioned in this Chapter are: "loving-kindness" (慈), which is the sense of loving with sympathy and one of the fundamental impulses of human beings for living together in harmony. "Frugality" (俭), whose meaning encompasses the sense of storing up, not being wanton or extravagant, and which has the same meaning of the term *se* 啬 [frugality, parsimonious] in Chapter 59. "Not daring to be ahead of the world (不敢为天

下先)" reflects the notions of "modestly foregoing (谦让)" and "not contending (不争)".

This chapter's core principle lies in the concept of loving-kindness. Laozi lived in an age of war and chaos and witnessed cruel violence, during which he deeply felt the lack of loving-kindness among people, and thus vigorously advocated for it.

Sixty-Eight

善爲士 (1) 者，不武；善戰者，不怒；善勝敵者，不與 (2)；善用人者，爲之下。是謂不爭之德，是謂用人，是謂配天，古之極也 (3)。

Those who are good at *wei shi* 爲士 [commanding soldiers, warriors] (1), are not *wu* 武 [military, aggressive]; those who are good at war, are not *nu* 怒 [fury, wrathful]; those who are good at winning over enemies, *bu yu* 不与 [not join] (2); those who are good at employing *ren* 人 [people, person], stay lower. This is called the *de* 德 [obtain, virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] of not contending, this is called employing *ren* 人 [people, person], this is called coordinating with *tian* 天 [Heaven, sky], the *ji* 极 [summit, apogee] of ancient times (3).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Wei shi* 为士 [commanding soldiers, warriors]: "*Wei* 为" means to administer, to supervise. It is used here in reference to ruling and commanding. "*Shi* 士 [official, soldier]" means soldiers. Commanding soldiers means to hold the position of a general.

   Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249): "'*Shi* 士 [official, soldier]' indicates the troop's commanders."

2) *Bu yu* 不与 [not join]: Not contending.

   Wang Bi: "Do not contend with."

   Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986): "The character '*yu* 与 [joint with, take part with, accord to]' should be understood as '*dou* 斗 [fight, contend, dipper].' The ancients used '*yu* 与' to refer to combat."

3) This is called the virtue of not contending, this is called employing others, this is called coordinating with Heaven, the summit of ancient times (是谓不争之德，是谓用人，是谓配天，古之极也). Wang Bi's version records: "This is called the virtue of not contending, this is called employing others' force, this is called coordinating with Heaven, the summit of ancient times (是谓不争之德，是谓用人之力，是谓配天古之极)." Here the text was amended according to the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)].

   Xu Kangsheng 许抗生 (b. 1937): "The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) records: 'This is called employing others, this is called coordinating

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with Heaven, the summit of ancient times (是胃（谓）用人，是胃（谓）肥（配）天，古之极也).' Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version records: 'This is called employing others' force, this is called coordinating with Heaven, the summit of ancient times (是谓用人之力，是谓配天，古之极也).' I suspect that the two characters '*zhi li* 之力 [power of, force of]' in Fu Yi's version are a later interpolation. Thus, we should follow the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)."[1]

Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018): "Both the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) do not record the two characters '*zhi li* 之力 [power of, force of],' but only 'this is called the virtue of not contending, this is called employing others, this is called coordinating with Heaven, the summit of ancient times (是谓不争之德，是谓用人，是谓配天，古之极也).' Here we see how the characters '*ren* 人 [people, person]' with '*tian* 天 [Heaven, sky]' and '*de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]' with '*ji* 极 [summit, apogee]' respectively form two couplets (rhymes), such that the whole section is rhyming. The received editions include the two characters '*zhi li* 之力 [power of, force of],' which form a completely different structure."

Contemporary Translation

Those who are good at their role as generals, do not boast of their military courage and value; those who are good at war affairs, are not easily enraged; those who are good at defeating their enemies, do not need to fight; those who are good at employing others, are humble towards them. This is what is called the virtue of not contending, this is what is called being good in employing others, this is what is called acting according to the Dao of Heaven (天道), this is the highest principle that has been passed on from ancient times.

Argument

"*Wu* 武 [military, aggressive]" and "*nu* 怒 [fury, wrathful]" refer to violent actions and are the manifestation of aggressiveness. Laozi wanted people to be

1 Xu Kangsheng 许抗生, *Boshu Laozi zhuyi yu yanjiu* 帛书老子注译与研究 [*Research on Interpretations and Annotations of Laozi Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1982), 61.

"not aggressive" and "not wrathful," which means they should not flaunt their superiority and not be ruthless and tyrannical. With regard to armed conflicts, he stressed a "not contending" attitude, wanting the people to not be vicious. This resonates with the idea of "loving-kindness and compassion" emphasized in the previous chapter in reference to warring conditions, which embodies a principle from ancient times.

Sixty-Nine

用兵有言：“吾不敢為主 (1)，而為客 (2)；不敢進寸，而退尺。” 是謂行無行 (3)；攘無臂 (4)；仍無敵 (5)；執無兵 (6)。
禍莫大於輕敵，輕敵幾喪吾寶。
故抗兵相若 (7)，哀 (8) 者勝矣。

There is a saying about employing armies: “I do not dare *wei* 为 [for, be, serve as] *zhu* 主 [host, main, master] (1), but *wei* 为 [for, be, serve as] *ke* 客 [guest, visitor, customer] (2); I do not dare to advance an inch, but retreat a foot.” This is to say *xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk] without (无) *xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk] (3), turn up one’s sleeve as if there were no arms (4), *reng* 扔 [throw, cast aside] without (无) *di* 敌 [enemy, fight, oppose] (5), hold no *bing* 兵 [soldier, military force, army] (6).

Calamities are no worse than underestimating the enemy, underestimating the enemy is not far from losing my treasure.

Therefore, if *kang* 抗 [contending] *bing* 兵 [soldier, military force, army] are *ruo* 若 [similar to, comply with] each other (抗兵相若) (7), the one who is *ai* 哀 [sympathize, be compassionate] (8) will win.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Wei* 为 [for, be, serve as] *zhu* 主 [host, main, master]: This means to invade, to take the offensive.

   Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown): “*Zhu* 主 [dominant, lord, host] means to take the initiative, [the sentence ‘吾不敢为主’ means] not dare to move the army first.”

   Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333): “*Wei zhu* 为主 [for the host, be the host] means creating an army and using it to attack.”

2) *wei* 为 [for, be, serve as] *ke* 客 [guest, visitor, customer]: This means to maintain a defensive position and have no choice but to confront the enemy.

3) *Xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk] without (无) *xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk]: *Xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk] means to march in procession or the arrangement of the forces. Thus “*xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk] without (无) *xing* 行 [to march, line, do, walk]” means that although

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equipped with military forces, it is like not having them in any particular arrangement.

4) Turn up one's sleeve as if there were no arms: Turning up one's sleeves means to raise one's arms out of anger. Thus, "turn up one's sleeve as if there were no arms" means that it is like wanting to raise one's arms but having no arms to raise.

5) *Reng* 扔 [throw, cast aside] without (无) *di* 敌 [enemy, fight, oppose]: "*Reng* 扔 [throw, cast aside]" means to engage. "*Reng* 扔 [throw, cast aside] *di* 敌 [enemy, fight, oppose]" means to attack the enemy. Thus, "*reng* 扔 [throw, cast aside] without (无) *di* 敌 [enemy, fight, oppose]" means that although facing the enemy, it is like having no enemy to attack. The *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] manuscript record this sentence as "only then there will be no enemies (乃无敌)," which is placed after the phrase "hold no soldier, taking hold as there were no military forces (执无兵)."

6) Hold no *bing* 兵 [soldier, military force, army]: "*Bing* 兵 [soldier, military force, army]" indicates military weapons. Thus "hold no *bing* 兵 [soldier, military force, army]" means that although equipped with military weapons, it is like having no weapons to hold.

   Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown): "If there is no intention to contend, then even though there is an army, it would be as if there were no arms that could be raised, there were no enemies that could be attacked, and no weapons that could be held. How, then, could there be any disasters caused by military forces!"

7) Contending armies are similar to each other: This means that two armies are equal and balanced. Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version records, "*jia* 加 [add, compared with]" instead of the character "*ruo* 若 [similar to, comply with]." Here it has been amended according to Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the *Dunhuang Xin* 敦煌辛 [*Dunhuang Xin Manuscript*], and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts* version.

   Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "The *Dunhuang* Tang manuscript records, 'therefore, if contending armies are similar to each other (故抗兵相如).' Fan Yingyuan's version, the Kaiyuan era manuscript, Heshang Gong's, as well as Wang Bi's version, record, '*xiang jia* 相加 [can be compared to each other]' instead of '*xiang ru* 相如 [similar to, comply with each other].' Wang Bi annotates '*kang* 抗 [contending]' means to rise up, and '*jia* 加 [add, compared with]' means to be equal to. The two characters '*ru* 如 [similar to, comply with]' and '*jia* 加 [add, compared with]'

have often been confused since ancient times. Another *Dunhuang* manuscript records '*xiang ruo* 相若 [similar to, comply with each other]', which is the same as in Fu Yi's version and the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*."

8) *Ai* 哀 [sympathize, be compassionate]: This has the same meaning as *ci* 慈 [loving-kindness, compassion]. The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] records: "*Ai* 哀 [sympathize, be compassionate] means *min* 闵 [sympathy, compassion]." "*Min* 闵 [sympathy, compassion]" has the same meaning as "*ci* 慈 [loving-kindness, compassion]" in Chapter 67.

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271): "The compassionate are sad/regretful and not cheered up by resorting to armed forces; those who eagerly array the army at the sound of war drums are not compassionate."

Contemporary Translation

One who commanded armies once remarked, "I do not dare to invade, but I stay defensive; do not dare to advance an inch, but retreat a foot." This means that although there is a military force, it is as if there were no army to be arrayed; although willing to rise one's arms, it is like there were no arms to be raised; although facing enemies, it is like there were no enemies to go against; although there are military weapons, it is like there were no military weapons to be used.

Calamities are not worse than underestimating the enemy, and underestimating the enemy is not far from having lost my "three treasures."

Therefore, if two armies are equal, the compassionate one will obtain victory.

Argument

First and foremost, Laozi is against war. One must not become embroiled in battles, must "not dare to be the host, but be the guest, not dare to advance an inch, but retreat a foot," i.e. not provoke but assume a defensive attitude, not be aggressive and not have intentions to cause disputes. The passage "march without marching, turn up one's sleeve as there were no arms, engage as there were no enemies, take hold as there were no military forces," refers to having the power to control the enemy but not using it rashly, and refers to the idea of being humble, retiring, and not contending with others. Lastly, Laozi warns

those who engage in war to not "underestimate the enemy," since underestimating the enemy is a form of belligerence which will lead to more deaths, and more deaths will tarnish loving-kindness which is why Laozi refers [to it as] "not far from losing my treasure."

This chapter is connected with the previous two chapters, all aiming at promulgating compassion and loving-kindness through the virtue of "not contending."

Seventy

吾言甚易知，甚易行。天下莫能知，莫能行。
言有宗 (1)，事有君 (2)。夫唯無知 (3)，是以不我知。
知我者希，則 (4) 我者貴 (5)。是以聖人被褐 (6) 懷玉。

My words are extremely easy to understand, extremely easy to put into practice. In this world no one can understand [them], no one can practice [them].

Yan you zong 言有宗 [speech possess the gist] (1), *shi you jun* 事有君 [tasks have a ruler] (2). Yet, because there is *wu zhi* 无知 [no understanding] (3), thus no one understands me.

Those who understand me are rare, and those who take me as *ze* 则 [model, norm] (4) are *gui* 贵 [esteemed, precious] (5). Hence, the sage *pi he* 被褐 [cloak [in] coarse wool] (6) but holds [in his heart fine] jade.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Yan you zong* 言有宗 [speech possess the gist]: Speech conveys the gist.

   Lü Jifu 吕吉甫 (Lü Huiqing 吕惠卿) (d. 1111): "The notion of non-action (无为) and self-so (自然) are the gist of the words."

2) *Shi you jun* 事有君 [tasks have a ruler]: Conduct has foundations. "*Jun* 君 [ruler, lord, foundation]" means "*zhu* 主 [foundation, principal]." "*You jun* 有君 [have a ruler]" means to have foundations.

   Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) edition records "*zhu* 主 [foundation, principal]" instead of "*jun* 君 [ruler, lord, foundation]".

3) *Wu zhi* 无知 [no understanding]: There are two possible interpretations. The first indicates other people's inability to understand, and the second indicates oneself's inability to understand. The contemporary translation here accepts the former interpretation.

4) *Ze* 则 [model, norm]: Model, standard.

   Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623): "'*Ze* 则 [norm, example]' means standard, model. It means to set an example."[1]

5) *Gui* 贵 [esteemed, precious]: Difficult to find.

1 Shi Deqing 释德清, ed., *Laozi daodejing jingjie* 老子道德经精解 [*Expounding the Daodejing of Laozi*] (Wuhan: Chongwen shuju, 2015).

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Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974): "Objects that are rare are considered precious, which is why '*gui* 贵 [precious, rare]' also means rare."

6) *Pi he* 被褐 [cloak [in] coarse wool]: "*Pi* 被 [cloak oneself in, mantle]" means to wear, and "*he* 褐 [dully-brown, coarse wool]" indicates rough clothes. "*Pi he* 被褐 [cloak in coarse wool]" therefore means to wear rough clothes. The *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*]) record "*er* 而 [but, then]" after these two characters.

Contemporary Translation

My words are very easy to understand, and very easy to put into practice. However, no one can comprehend them or put them into practice.

[My] speech conveys the gist, [my] conduct has foundations. Without understanding this principle, then it is just not possible to understand me.

People who are able to understand me are less than a few, and those who take me as model are difficult to find. Hence, the sage who follows the Dao wears rough clothes, but inside holds in their heart fine jade.

Argument

Laozi advocates emptiness, quietness, softness, harmony, loving-kindness/compassion, frugality, and not contending as the intrinsic principles of human nature. These are the easiest principles to implement in everyday life and the most efficacious ones. However, people of this world are driven by impatience and obsessed with glory and profit which all run counter to these principles.

Laozi's thought is an attempt to conduct an ultimate investigation on human behavior and achieve an essential understanding of the things of this world, and then express simple principles in unadorned language. Even though the words are unembellished and the principles are simple, their content is extremely rich, exactly like the metaphor of wearing rough clothes while inside holding a heart of fine jade. Unfortunately, people of this world only admire embellished but superficial appearances, and this is why he claims, "Those who understand me are rare."

Seventy-One

知不知 (1)，尚矣 (2)；不知知 (3)，病也。聖人不病，以其病病 (4)。夫唯病病，是以不病 (5)。

Zhi 知 [knowing, aware] not *zhi* 知 [knowing, aware] (1), *shang* 尚 [value, esteem] *yi* 矣 [final particle] (2); not *zhi* 知 [knowing, aware] *zhi* 知 [knowing, aware] (3), *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], by *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] (4). It is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] (5).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Zhi* 知 [knowing, aware] not *zhi* 知 [knowing, aware]: There are several ways of interpreting this phrase, the most common are: 1) knowing but not thinking that one knows; 2) knowing (being aware) that there is that which one does not know (or is not aware of).

2) *Shang* 尚 [value, esteem]: In Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) and Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) versions, it is the character *shang* 上 [on, above, high] used here instead of the character *shang* 尚 [value, esteem], and *yi* 矣 [final particle] is missing. In ancient Chinese, *shang* 尚 [value, esteem] and *shang* 上 [on, above, high] are interchangeable.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes, "The *Dao ying* 道应 [*Responses of the Dao*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] cites [this chapter of the *Laozi*] as '[One] knows while regards oneself as not knowing, this is the best; [One does] not know while regards oneself as knowing, this is a weakness (知而不知，尚矣；不知而知，病也).' The Fu yan 符言 [*The Discourse of Omen*] chapter of the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*] has 'Knowing that [one] does not know, this is the best; Not knowing but thinking that one knows, this is a weakness (知不知，上也；不知知，病也).'"

The meaning of Wang Bi's text is not clear, it is fair to rectify the text in light of the citation in the *Huainanzi*. The *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] versions as well as Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version all have "*shang* 上 [on, above, high]" as "*shang* 尚 [value, esteem]

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yi 矣 [final particle]." This is identical to the citation in the *Dao ying* 道应 [*Responses of the Dao*] chapter of the *Huainanzi*, and thus [the current text] is corrected on the basis of the aforementioned references. In the next sentence after "*bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]" the character *ye* 也 (too, affirmative auxiliary particle) is added in accordance with the version.

3) Not *zhi* 知 [knowing, aware] *zhi* 知 [knowing, aware]: Not knowing yet thinking that one does know.

4) *Bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]: Taking the sickness or defect as a sickness or defect. "Who recognizes [the] sick-minded as sick-minded."[1]

5) It is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]: Wang Bi's version has it as "It is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], that is because they *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], [and is thereby] not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]." Here we have repetition and misplacement; according to Chiang Hsi-Chang's (Jiang Xichang) understanding, we should correct the text according to the citation in the [*Taiping*] *Yu Lan* [太平] 御览 [*Imperial Reader* (*of the Taiping Era*)]:

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) writes: "The *Ji bing bu* 疾病部 [*The Category of Diseases*] chapter of the [*Taiping*] *Yu Lan* cites this chapter of the *Laozi* as follows: 'The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], by *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. It is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried].' This version is better than the other available versions and thus the current text should be remedied according to it. Because the sentence that begins with the phrase '*fu wei* 夫唯 [it is because (of)]' usually follows and repeats the meaning of the previous sentence, and this is a characteristic rhetoric in the text of the *Laozi*. Here I want to demonstrate my point by [a review of] the entire text [of the Laozi]. In Chapter 2, we read 'Deeds are accomplished but [he or she] does not reside [therein]. It is because [one] does not reside [therein], [one is] not lost (功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。).' The sentences that begins with the phrase 'it is because' follow and repeat the meaning of 'not residing' of the previous sentence, this serves to be the first example. In Chapter 8, we read: 'Water is good because it

1 Tr. note: This sentence is written in English by Chen.

benefits the ten thousand things without engaging in contending.... Only because it does not contend is there no *you* 尤 [wrongdoing, reproach.' The sentences that begin with 'because it does not contend' follow and repeat the meaning of 'not contending' from the previous context; this serves as the second example. In Chapter 15, we read, 'If one preserves this Dao, there will be no desire for fullness. It is only because there is no fullness that the worn-out can be renewed.' The sentences that begin with 'it is because there is no fullness' follows and repeats the meaning of 'no desire for fullness' in the previous sentence; this serves as the third example. In Chapter 72, we read 'without *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted] (3) the lives they lead. Because it is without *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted], [they] can take on not *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted].' The sentences that begin with 'it is because of no restraint (厌)' follow and repeat the meaning of 'no restraint (厌)' from the previous sentence; this serves as the fourth example. Here in this chapter [from the commonly received revisions, e.g., Wang Bi's version], the two sentences 'it is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]' were mistakenly placed before the sentences 'the sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], by *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]', and a repeating phrase of '[thus, one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]' was added at the end of the chapters—[all this proves that] it loses the original form of the ancient text."

Contemporary Translation

Knowing that there is that which one does not know, this is the best. Not knowing but thinking that one knows, this is a weakness. Those with the Dao (有道的人) do not have weaknesses, because they take their weaknesses as weaknesses. It is precisely because they take their weaknesses as weaknesses that they have no weaknesses.

Argument

This chapter discusses the attitudes towards being not knowing.

Some people only see the superficial level of things and events, they (mistakenly) think they have penetrated what they truly are. Or else, getting something they think they understand (know) it all, trying to take what they

do not know as something they know. Regarding the attitude of investigation, they lack genuine sincerity, so the text accuses them of having a preposterous "disease." People with the Dao are not taken to be preposterous because they are continually self-conscious and introspective. They are able to sincerely investigate the reason and root cause of their "not knowing." They are people who would not easily assert anything before knowing it. In the process of seeking knowledge (or understanding) they can be genuinely sincere in their mentality.

Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius) (d. 479 BC) said, "When you know you know something, and when you know you don't know something, that is knowledge." And Socrates said, "Knowing that one does not know." The meaning of these two sentences is similar. People should have the wisdom of self-awareness, moreover, they should be sincere and honest when viewing themselves, and require their own self-improvement.

Seventy-Two

民不畏威，則大威至 (1)。
無狎 (2) 其所居，無厭 (3) 其所生。夫唯不厭，是以不厭 (4)。
是以聖人自知不自見 (5)；自愛不自貴 (6)。故去彼取此 (7)。

The people not *wei* 畏 [fear, avoid] *wei* 威 [power, prestige], thereby great *wei* 威 [power, prestige] *zhi* 至 [arrive, to the utmost] (1).

Without *xia* 狎 (be intimate with) (2) where they live, without *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted] (3) the lives they lead. Because it is without *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted], [they] can take on not *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted] (4).

Thus the sages understand themselves (自知) and not *zi* 自 [self, oneself] *jian* 见 [see, meet, appear, be seen] (5); love themselves while not attach importance to themselves (6). Thus, get rid of the former and take this (7).

Commentary and Explanation

1) The people not *wei* 畏 [fear, avoid] *wei* 威 [power, prestige], thereby great *wei* 威 [power, prestige] *zhi* 至 (arrive, to the utmost): In "*wei* 畏 [fear, avoid] *wei* 威 [power, prestige]" *wei* 威 [power, prestige] means coercion. The *wei* 威 [power, prestige] in "great *wei* 威 [power, prestige]" indicates something horrifying; here it is interpreted as calamity.

   Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) comments: "When *wei* 威 [power, prestige] can no longer control the people, the people will not bear the *wei* 威 [power, prestige] [of the ruler], and they will burst from the top and bottom."

   Cheng Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944) writes: "Among the people, who do not take pleasure in life but fear death? However, when the power of the coercive force strengthens, the power of the rebellion will [also] become more fierce, and this [situation] under an autocratic government will lead to many explosions [of rebellion]."

   Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979) writes: "When an autocratic government uses *wei* 威 [power, prestige] and authority to coerce the people, the people will eventually reach the point when they cannot stand it anymore, and will not hesitate to cause chaos at the cost of their lives."

2) *Xia* 狎 [be intimate with]: A loan word for "*xia* 狭 [narrow, tight]."

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Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) writes: "According to the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*], '*xia* 狭 [narrow, tight]' can be taken as '*shan* 陕 (narrow),' which means '*ai* 隘 [narrow, distress].' '*Ai* 隘 [narrow, distress]' has the meaning of '*po* 迫 [force, compel].' These words urge the one who governs the world, not to restrain the living of the people that [only] makes the people feel uneasy."

Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version, Jinglong era stele version, Gu Huan's 顾欢 (d. 485) version, the seventh and ninth *Dunhuang xin* 敦煌 [*Dunhuang Manuscript*] versions and many other ancient versions have "*xia* 狎 [be intimate with]" for "*xia* 狭 (narrow, tight)."

3) *Yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted]: Means "*ya* 压 [pressed, strain]."

Xi Dong writes, "According to the *Shuowen jiezi* '*yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted]' can be taken as '*ze* 笮 [bamboo or reed mat placed under tiles and above ridgepole, narrow, confined].' [The whole phrase '无厌其所生' means] not restraining (厌笮) people's lives and making them live uneasily."

4) Because it is without *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted], [they] can take on not *yan* 厌 (loath, disgusted): Because it is without pressuring and confining [the people] that the people will not hate [the ruler].

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) writes: "The first '*yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted]' here goes with the '*yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted]' in 'without *yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted] the lives they lead'. The second '*yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted]' is related to the '*yan* 厌 [press, restrain, loath, disgusted]' in Chapter 66, which reads, 'everything in this world gladly commend [the ruler] (4) and do not object [厌] because the ruler does not contend.' Saying that because the ruler does not restrain and force (厌迫) his or her people, then his or her people will not hate (厌恶) him or her."

5) Not *zi* 自 [self, oneself] *jian* 见 [see, meet, appear, be seen]: *Jian* 见 [see, meet, appear] is read as *xian* here,[1] which means expression or manifestation. So "not *zi* 自 [self, oneself] *jian* 见 [see, meet, appear, be seen]" means not to praise oneself [i.e. let one's deed be seen by the others]. See note 4 in Chapter 22.

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1 Tr. note: When 见 is read *xian* is the ancient character for 现 [to appear, to manifest], e.g. "见龙在田" (cf. *Zhouyi* 周易 [*Classic of Changes*].) In other words, the character 见, written as such in the ancient text, can mean either to see, or to be seen (i.e. manifest), depending on the context.

6) Love themselves not attach importance to themselves: This means that the sage seeks self love but does not seek to make themselves appear as lofty and noble.

   Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "'Self-love' means pure and still with few desires, 'attach importance to themselves' means having lots of conscious and assertive actions [有为] and desires, so here what is being talked about is sages being pure, still, and having few desires, that is, not having lots of conscious and assertive actions and desires."

7) Thus, getting rid of the former and taking this: It means to replace "self flaunting" and "[attaching importance to oneself" with "self-understanding (自知)" and "loving oneself."

Contemporary Translation

When the people do not fear their ruler's authority and power, then a great calamity will occur.

The people should not be forced to live in certain place, and their lives should not be pressed or squeezed. Only if people are not pressed or squeezed will they not hate [the ruler].

Thereby those with the Dao seek self-understanding (自知) instead of self-praise; they seek self-love and do not display themselves as lofty and noble. In this way they lose the latter and gain the former.

Argument

Tyrannical politics and force make use of terrifying methods to press people, and the people become unable to live peacefully. When they cannot be peaceful, they will risk danger in desperation.

This chapter provides a warning about coercive politics.

Seventy-Three

勇於敢則殺，勇於不敢則活 (1)。此兩者，或利或害 (2)。天之所惡，孰知其故？【是以聖人猶難之 (3)。】
天之道 (4)，不爭而善勝，不言而善應，不召而自來，繟然 (5) 而善謀。天網 (6) 恢恢 (7)，疏而不失 (8)。

Courage in daring and then dead, courage in not daring and then live (1). [Among] these two, one benefits one harms (2). [*Shi yi* 是以 [therefore, consequently] the sages especially consider things as difficult] (3).

The Dao of heaven (4), no conflict and yet good success, no words and yet good response, no call and yet self coming, *chan* 繟 [generous, calm] *ran* 然 [like this, thusly] (5) and yet good scheme. *Tian* 天 [heaven, nature] *wang* 网 [net, to gather together, system] (6) *huihui* 恢 恢 [vast, extensive] (7) sparse and yet not *shi* 失 [miss, lose, fail] (8).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Courage in daring and then dead, courage in not daring and then live: Courage in being firm and strong results in death, courage in being soft and weak means living.

   Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "In Chapter 76 we read: 'Thus, the firm and strong are followers of death (6) the soft and weak are followers of life.' Courageous (敢) means 'firm and strong (坚强)', not courageous means 'soft and weak (柔弱)'."

2) These two, one benefits one harms: This means that having courage in being soft and weak results in benefit, having courage in being firm and strong results in harm.

3) [*Shiyi* 是以 [therefore, consequently] the sages especially consider things as difficult]: This sentence comes from Chapter 63, and appears again here.

   The Jinglong era stele version, Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) version, the *Cijie* 次解 [*Daode zhenjing ci jie* 道德真经次解 (*Sequential Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing*)] version, and the *Dunhuang Xin* 敦煌辛 [*Dunhuang Manuscript, the eighth bundle*] are all missing this sentence. When [we further] verify this finding with the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] version, the latter shows this [finding] was reliable. Therefore, based on the finding, this sentence [in question] should be

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deleted. Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) writes: "'*Shi* 是 (is, affirm) *yi* 以 (go by, take as)' does not fit in this context; that is because this is a repetition of Chapter 63."

Ma Xulun 马叙伦 (d. 1970) writes: "The sentence beginning with '*Shiyi* 是以 [therefore, consequently]' should be a repeating line originally from Chapter 63, due to misplacement of the bamboo slip. The Yizhou version [i.e. *Longxing guan daodejing beiben* 龙兴观道德经碑本 (viz., the *Daodejing* text copied from the stele at the Longxing Temple)] does not have this sentence, which can serve as a proof [for my judgment]."

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) writes: "The sentence '*Shìyi* 是以 [therefore, consequently] the sages especially consider things as difficult' is not found in Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) version, the incomplete transcripts from the Six Dynasties (222–589), the Jinglong era version or the Longxing Temple version. This sentence must have been added by certain later scholar who cited this sentence from Chapter 63 in order to comment on this Chapter [namely, Chapter 73]. It is better to delete this sentence [from the current chapter]."

4) The Dao of heaven: The regulatory patterns of nature (自然).

5) *Chan* 绰 [generous, calm] *ran* 然 [like this, thusly]: Calm and undisturbed, in a settled (unanxious) manner, relaxed.

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: *Chan* 绰 [generous, calm] means lenient or broad.

Yan Zun's 严遵 version, the *Dunhuang Xin* 敦煌辛 [*Dunhuang manuscript, the eighth bundle*], Wang Pang's 王雱 (d. 1076) version, Lü Huiqing's 吕惠卿 (d. 1111) version, Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (d. 1271) version, Wu Cheng's 吴澄 (d. 1333) version, and other ancient versions have "*tan* 坦 [unperturbed, calm]" for "*chan* 绰 [generous, a kind of]."

6) *Tian* [heaven, nature] *wang* 网 [net, to get together, system]: Natural scope (自然的范围).

7) *Huihui* 恢恢 [vast, extensive]: Broad, extensive.

8) *Shi* 失 (miss, lose, fail): Leak.

Contemporary Translation

Courage in being firm and strong results in death, courage in being soft and weak means living. These two types of courage, one reaps benefit and the other encounters danger. That which the Dao of heaven dislikes—who can know the root cause?

The regulatory patterns of nature, without conflict and strife and yet being good at gaining success, without talking and yet being good at responding, without summoning and yet automatically coming forth, relived and yet good at strategies. The limits of nature are vast and boundless, far reaching and yet nothing will leak through.

Argument

Laozi thinks that the regulatory patterns of nature are soft, weak, and without conflict. Human action should take to according with the regulatory patterns of nature and dislike and warn against the firm, strong, and aggressive. "Courage in daring" is being stubbornly greedy, lacking fear; "courage in not daring" is being soft, weak, and kind, it is being cautious in action. Human action should choose the latter and reject the former.

Seventy-Four

民不畏死，奈何以死懼之？若使民常畏死，而為奇 (1) 者，吾將得而殺之 (2)，孰敢？
常有司殺者 (3) 殺。夫代司殺者 (4) 殺，是謂代大匠斲 (5)；夫代大匠斲者，稀有不傷其手矣。

[If] the people do not fear death, why and how can death be taken to [make] them afraid? If the people were made to always fear death, then those who were taken as *ji* 奇 [strange, odd, unusual] (1) I will obtain and kill them (2), who dares?

Often there is an officer of death (3) who kills. Substituting the officer of death (4) to kill, it is called substituting for a great craftsman to *zhuo* 斫 [cut, chop] (5). He who substitutes for a great craftsman to *zhuo* 斫 [cut, chop], hardly does not injure his or her hands.

Commentary and Explanation

1) *Ji* 奇 [strange, odd, unusual]: Means weird and strange. "Those who were taken as *ji* 奇 [strange, odd, unusual]" indicates those who do things that are evil and bad.

   Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249) writes: "Deviant and disruptive to the community is called *ji* 奇 [strange, odd, unusual]."

2) I will obtain and kill them: In the received version *de* 得 [gain, obtain] is preceded by an erroneous supplement, *zhi* 执 (carry out, grasp); this has been changed according to the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version.

   Xu Kangsheng 许抗生 (b. 1937) writes: "In the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version, this line is 'I obtain and kill them' and Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version is the same as the *Mawangdui* version for this sentence. However, based on the context, *jiang* 将 [will, to lead] should be kept. We should now go by the Mawangdui *Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version."

   Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) writes: "Fu Yi's version reads 'I obtain (得) *zhi* 执 [arrest grasp] and kill them'; here the word '*zhi* 执 [arrest, grasp]' is superfluous. The word *de* 得 [gain, obtain] already contains the meaning of 'arresting' and 'capturing (arresting)'.... This should be 'I obtain (得) and kill them' as the *Mawangdui* versions have it."

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3) Officer of death: Someone who is exclusively in charge of killing people; here it indicates the way of heaven.
4) Substituting officer of death: Someone substituting for an executioner.

Zhang Mosheng 张默生 (d. 1979) writes: "'Substituting officer of death' is passing off or pretending to be the way of heaven."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "The ruler of the people cannot be pure and still, and must rely exclusively on punishments, and kill in the place of (substituting for) heaven."

5) *Zhuo* 斫 [cut, chop]: Hack, slice.

Contemporary Translation

If the people do not fear death, why use death to scare them? If the people are made to really fear death, then to those who do evil things, we can capture them and kill them. Who would still dare to do all sorts of bad things?

Often there is an executioner who carries out the duties of executions. Now, if someone substitutes the executioner and carries out the duties of executions, this is like having someone substitute for a carpenter and cut wood. Of those who substitute for a carpenter, very few will not harm their own hands.

Argument

Human life and death is, at its root, in accord with nature. As Zhuangzi 庄子 (d. 286 BCE) says, human life comes when it is an appropriate time, and human death follows an appropriate time as well. Human life is on earth, and people should enjoy the years allotted to them. But totalitarian rulers, only for the sake of protecting their own power and interest, rule by resort to heavy punishment (e.g. mutilation) and authoritarian control. Yet killing people for selfish reasons, making many people, when they are young and strong, to be driven to poverty and become punished and executed instead of living out their natural years.

This chapter is a deep protest by Laozi against the practices of harsh punishment and inhumane laws during his time, which forced people into deadly situations.

Seventy-Five

民之饑，以其上食稅之多，是以饑。
民之難治，以其上之有為 (1)，是以難治。
民之輕死，以其上求生之厚 (2)，是以輕死。
夫唯無以生為 (3) 者，是賢 (4) 於貴生 (5)。

The people starve, because their superiors eat lots of tax, in this way [the people] starve.

The people are hard to govern, because their superiors *you* 有 [have, presence] *wei* 为 [do, act][1] (1), in this way [the people are] difficult to govern.

The people take death lightly, because their superiors go after richness in life (2), in this way [the people] take death lightly.

Only those who do not take life [as valuable] (3), are *xian* 贤 [able, virtuous, worthy] (4) over valuing life (5).

Commentary and Explanation

1) *You* 有 [have, presence] *wei* 为 (do, act): Policies and regulations are rigorous and harsh; intensive and rash actions.

   Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) writes: "'*You* 有 [have, presence] *wei* 为 [do, act]' speaks to rulers overdoing it with intellectual means [e.g. political tactics]."

   Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998) writes: "This chapter reveals the essence of the class contradiction between working people and their feudal rulers. The famine of the people is caused by the rulers' heavy taxation; the rebellion of the people is because of the rulers' oppressive governance; the people taking life lightly is caused by the rulers' insatiable accumulation [of wealth]. This kind of statement is, of course, consistent with *wu-wei* 无为 [non-action, non-assertive action] found throughout the *Laozi*."

2) Because their superiors go after richness in life: It means "it is because the rulers foster [their own] luxuries".

1 Tr. note: *You* 有 [have, presence] *wei* 为 (do, act) is often contrasted with *wu-wei* 无为 [non-action, non-assertive action].

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The word "superiors (上)" is missing from Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version and has been added based on Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version.

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) writes: "'Superiors (上)' is missing from the text, but Fu Yi's version and Du Daojian's 杜道坚 (d. 1318) version both include 'superiors (上).' Wang Bi's commentary reads: 'This talks about how the people's deviant behavior and the reason for chaos in governing, all come from superiors, and not from the people themselves. The people follow their superiors.' According to this commentary, and the previous two sentences, there should be the word 'superiors (上)' here; based on Fu Yi's version and Wang Bi's commentary the word 'superiors (上)' is added here."

3) Only those who do not take life [as valuable]: Not taking esteeming life and luxuries as goals worth going after. It means not esteeming life, and that life should be lived quietly and contentedly.[2]

Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) comments: "It is only those who do not take life as a duty, do not let social status and income influence their will, and do not let riches and benefit enter their bodies."

4) *Xian* 贤 (able, virtuous, worthy): Here it means to overcome, to win out over.

5) Valuing life: [It refers to] carefully nourishing life.

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) writes: "Rulers esteem life, thereby carefully nourishing their lives; carefully nourishing their lives leads them to [implement] harsh taxes."

Contemporary Translation

The people are hungry, it is because the rulers swallow too much in taxes, thereby causing [the people] to sink into hunger.

The people are difficult to govern, it is because the rulers act tyrannically, thereby causing [the people] to be difficult to govern.

The people take death lightly, it is because the rulers foster [their own] luxuries, thereby causing [the people] to risk their lives [to rebel].

It is only the pure, calm (still), quiet and contented[3] person who can win out over the person who fosters [their own] luxuries.

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2 Tr. note: Here *tiandan* 恬淡 is translated as "quietly and contentedly" and also points to being indifferent towards fame or profit.

3 Tr. note: See the previous note.

Argument

The root cause of devastating disordered governing is exploitation and high pressure. When rulers arbitrarily impose tax, fiercely collect wealth, and take tens of thousands from the people for their own self-nourishment [through material means], so that harsh policies lead to people being easily punished. In this way the rulers already become blood sucking insects and wolves. When the situation is like this, and people are on the brink of starvation and death, they will make a stand [and resist the government], not caring about risking their lives!

This chapter provides a warning against abusive governments.

Seventy-Six

人之生也柔弱 (1)，其死也堅強 (2)。
草木 (3) 之生也柔脆 (4)，其死也枯槁 (5)。
故堅強者死之徒 (6)，柔弱者生之徒 (7)。
是以兵強則滅，木強則折 (8)。
強大處下，柔弱處上。

Human life is soft and weak (1), human death is stiff and firm (2).

Grasses and trees (3) alive are soft and crisp (柔脆) (4), dead they are dry and withered (枯槁) (5).

Thus, the firm and strong are *tu* 徒 [follower, type] of death (6) the soft and weak are *tu* 徒 [follower, type] of life (7).

In this way, soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut (8).

The strong and big belong below, the soft and weak belong above.

Commentary and Explanation

1) Soft and weak: This means human bodies are soft and supple.
2) Stiff and firm: This means human bodies are rigid and stiff. In both *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] versions, there are the words "*jin ren* 筋肕 [tendon and ligament]" preceding the words "stiff and firm".
3) Grasses and trees: In the received version of the *Laozi* "grasses and trees" is preceded by "all things (万物)." Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639), Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41), Wang Pang's 王雱 (d. 1076), Lü Jifu's 吕吉甫 (Lü Huiqing 吕惠卿) (d. 1111), Shao Ruoyu's 邵若愚, Peng Si's 彭耜 (d. 1229), Dong Sijing's 董思靖 (Song Dynasty; dates unknown), Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown), Wu Cheng's 吴澄 (d. 1333) and Jiao Hong's 焦竑 (d. 1620) versions are all missing the words "all things (万物)," so they are omitted here.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "Judging by the meaning, 'all things (万物)' must be an (unwarranted) supplement, because 'soft and crisp' and 'dry and withered' all particularly describe grasses and trees [rather than all things]."

Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) writes: "'Humans' and 'grasses and trees' belong to 'all things (万物),' so the words 'all things (万物)' are an

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(unwarranted) supplement; in accordance with Fu Yi's version they are deleted."

4) Soft and crisp (柔脆): Means the shape and substance of grasses and trees are soft and supple.

   In Su Zhe's 苏辙 (d. 1112) version and Ye Mengde 叶梦得 (d. 1148) "soft and crisp (柔脆)" is "soft and weak (柔弱)."

5) Dry and withered (枯槁): Describes the grasses and trees as dry and withered (干枯).

6) The firm and strong are *tu* 徒 [follower, type] of death: This means that the firm and strong belong to the same category as death.

7) The soft and weak are *tu* 徒 [follower, type] of life: This means that the soft and weak belong to the same category as life.

8) Soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) version reads, "Soldiers are strong then they will not success, trees are strong, then *bing* 兵 [be injured, be killed]." According to the *Liezi* 列子 [*Writings of Master Lie*], the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*], and other books, this has been corrected.

   Peng Si 彭耜 (d. 1229) writes: "In Huang Maocai's 黄茂材 (d. 907) version 'cut' replaces '*gong* 共 [share, total, common].'[1] Huang writes, "The *Liezi* records Lao Dan 老聃 saying 'Soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut'. The *Liezi* is likely to have inherited the meaning of the *Laozi*, and the era when it came out was not far from the age of the *Laozi*. 'Trees are strong then cut' is more in line with the text; the received version has '*gong* 共 [share, total, common]' which is then interpreted to be read as *gong* 拱 (arch, join, surround), but this argument does not make sense, so we amend the text in accordance with the *Liezi* (*Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text*].) Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907) writes: "Note: It is difficult to understand the text read as 'trees are strong then *bing* 兵 [be injured, be killed]'. Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) version reads 'trees are strong then *gong* 共 [share, total, common],' which makes even less sense. The original *Laozi* reads 'trees are strong then cut.' It is because the character *zhe* 折 [cut] was damaged/corrupted, so only the 斤 on the right part was left, and then it was mistaken as *bing* 兵 [army, arms] because of the previous phrase 'soldiers are strong then they will not success.' [which has the character *bing* 兵 in it]. The '*gong* 共 [share, total, common]' was a further corruption from the '*bing* 兵 [army, arms]'. The *Liezi* quotes Lao Dan as 'soldiers

1 Tr. note: *Gong* replaces "cut" in the received version of the *Laozi*.

are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut', which should have come from this chapter. Therefore, we can amend the text here according to [the quote in the *Liezi*]."

Liu Shipei 刘师培 (d. 1919) writes: "Note: What Yu [Yue] says is right. The *Huainanzi* also records, 'soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut,' so we can suspect that 'not success' was a latter comment."

Xi Dong 奚侗 (d. 1939) writes: "When the trees grow too strong, they lose flexibility/elasticity and are easy to be broken. Many versions have '*zhe* 折 [cut]' as '*gong* 共 [share, total, common]' or '*bing* 兵 [army, arms]'. They are all incorrect. '*Zhe* 折 [cut]' was incorrectly taken as '*bing* 兵 [army, arms]' because of the textual corruption, and then it was mistaken as '*gong* 共 [share, total, common]' due to the similarity in form between these two characters. The words should be corrected according to the *Liezi*, the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Book of Master Wen*], and the *Huainanzi*."

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) writes: "The *Liezi* has 'not success' as 'extinguish' and '*bing* 兵 [army, arms]' as '*zhe* 折 [cut]'; they are correct. The words 'extinguish' and '*zhe* 折 [cut]' also rhyme with one another.

Note: Both *Mawangdui* versions have this sentence as 'soldiers are strong then they will not succeed,' which is the same as Wang Bi's version and many other versions. The next sentence in the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version is 'trees are strong then *heng* 恒 [permanent, lasting]' and the Mawangdui *Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version has it as 'trees are strong then *jing* 竞 [contest, struggle]'." Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018) thinks: "Both Yan Zun and Fu Yi read the text as 'trees are strong then *gong* 共 [share, total, common]' there is no mistake. '*Gong* 共 [share, total, common]', '*heng* 恒 [permanent, lasting]', and '*jing* 竞 [contest, struggle]' all have the same pronunciation in classical Chinese. Here they are all loan words for '*hong* 烘 [bake, heat]'." The *Er Ya* 尔雅 [*Approaching Correctness*] records "'*Hong* 烘 [bake, heat]' is a word for '*liao* 燎 [torch, burn]'."

Contemporary Translation

When people are alive, their bodies are soft and supple, when they are dead they become rigid and stiff.

When grasses and woods are growing, their shape and substance are soft and crisp; when they die, they become dry and withered.

So, strong and firm things belong to the same category as dead things, soft and supple things belong to the same category as living things.

Thus, stubbornly using soldiers (or resorting to arms) will invite extermination and death; trees that are large and solid invite cutting.

Everything that is strong and large does, paradoxically, belong to the lower positions; and everything that is soft and supple does, paradoxically, belong to the higher positions.

Argument

From [the perspective of] the phenomenon of human and vegetation life, Laozi shows that the things that grow are all in a state where they are soft and weak, and the things that die are all in a state where they are firm and hard. Laozi, [looking] into the activities of all things, investigates the constant state of the objective patterns of things, asserting, "Thus, the firm and strong belong to the category of death, the soft and weak belong to the category of life." This conclusion also implies that strong and fierce things easily lose their life and vitality, and soft and pliable things are full of life and vitality. This is illustrated by the intrinsic development of things. In terms of external expressions, the firm and strong belong to the category of death because they are too prominent, so when an external power lashes out, they [firm and strong] will bear the brunt of the force. Abilities externally exposed are easily tabooed against and suffer, this is why a tall and big tree is so often cut down—[they cause it by being so prominent, with their "talent" exposed]. Human-made disasters are like this as well, and a natural disaster is not different. A crazy wind blows and the tall and big trees are often broken or uprooted. Small grasses, because they are weak and supple, can be moved by the wind [without breaking].

This chapter shows the esteem for the soft and warning against the hard in Laozi's thinking. The idea is that "soft and weak beats out the hard and strong," as shown in Chapters 36, 43, and 78.

Seventy-Seven

天之道，其猶張弓與？高者抑之，下者舉之；有餘者損之，不足者補之。
天之道，損有餘而補不足。人之道 (1)，則不然，損不足以奉有餘。
孰能有餘以奉天下，唯有道者。
是以聖人為而不恃，功成而不處，其不欲見賢 (2)。

The Dao of heaven (天之道)[1] it resembles stretching of a bow? High, it suppresses, low it raises. When it is surplus, it reduces, when it is not enough, it compensates.

The Dao of heaven (天之道), reduce what excesses, and compensate what is not enough. The Dao of humans (人之道)[2] (1), is not like this, reducing [that which is, those which have] not enough in order to enrich [that which, those who] have surplus.

Who can have surplus and use it to enrich the world (天下), only the one who has the Dao.

It is the sage [who] acts but does not rely, achieves successes but does not take charge of/preside over it (处), they do not desire let their worthiness be seen (2).

Commentary and Explanation

1) The Dao of humans (人之道): This means the general laws and norms of society.

Yang Xingshun 杨兴顺 (d. 1987) writes: "In Laozi's view, 'reduces what excesses, and compensate what is not enough' is the most basic natural law of the natural world—'the Dao of heaven (天之道)'. However, people have already forgotten 'the Dao of heaven (天之道)' and replaced it by establishing their own laws—'the Dao of humans (人之道)' and they only provide benefits for the rich and losses for the poor. 'The Dao of heaven (天之道)' provides benefits for the poor, giving them tranquility and safety, 'the Dao of humans (人之道)' is the opposite, it is a tool in

1 Tr. note: This can also be translated as "way of Heaven" or "way of heaven" depending on context.

2 Tr. note: This can also be translated as "way of man" depending on context.

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the hands of the rich, and makes the poor desperate enough to 'not fear death'."[3]

2) It is the sage [who] acts but does not rely, achieves successes but does not take charge of/preside over (处), they do not desire let their worthiness be seen: The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version has 'achieves successes but does not take charge of/preside over (处), they do not desire let their worthiness be seen' as 'acts but does not have (弗有), achieves successes but does not live (弗居) [in them].' Preceding 'they do not desire let their worthiness be seen' the Mawangdui B version has "like this (若此)." "Seen (见)" means "appear (现)." Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) reads worthiness (贤) with the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] as explained as being rich.

Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) writes: "The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] says 'worthiness (贤)' is explained as being wealthy.' In Chapter 3 we find 'Not promoting talented [persons] (1) makes the people not contend'. This means that if wealth is not esteemed, then the people will not be made to contend with one another. Here 'worthiness (贤)' is also explained as being wealthy; it refers to the abovementioned 'having surplus'. Here what is being discussed is 'the sage who acts but does not rely on surplus, achieves successes but does not take charge of the surplus, they do not at all desire to see the situation in which they have surplus.' These three lines continue what was discussed above."

Feng Dafu 冯达甫 (d. 1997) writes: "'Worthiness (贤)' is often explained as being smart, intelligent, and able, looking at what makes sense for the entire chapter, what Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) says works better. This chapter begins by talking about the regulatory laws of nature (自然), then it talks about common situations in the human realm, and then looks at the choices of someone who is in line with the Dao (有道之人), and ends by talking about how the sage positions themselves. When one recognizes the Dao of heaven, one is supposed to know what to take and what to give up."

3 Tr. note: This is a reference to Chapter 74, where the people are said not to fear death because they are in such a dire situation.

Contemporary Translation

The regulatory laws of nature (自然的规律), are they not like pulling a bowstring? When the string is in a high position, it must be pushed down, when it is in a low position, it must be pulled up. If there is extra, adding loses, when there is not enough, adding supplements. The regulatory laws of nature, loss has excess, it can be used to compensate when there is not enough. The [social] laws for human action, are not like this, instead they want to deprive what is not enough, and use it to enhance those who have surplus.

Who can take what is in surplus and use it to provide for that which is lacking under heaven? Only someone who has the Dao is able to do it.

Therefore, someone who has the Dao can cultivate and nourish all things and not flaunt themselves and their abilities; with some success, and not resting in one's own achievements, not wanting to show one's own intelligence or abilities.

Argument

This chapter is an explanation of the contrast between the regulatory laws of nature and the rules and laws of society. Social rules and laws are extremely unfair—"Inside the red-lacquered doors,[4] wine and meat are left over to spoil; while outside on the street, there are people who freeze to death (朱门酒肉臭路有冻死骨)"—how many families are rich and gain without laboring at all, how many people with authority and power harshly gain from others, everywhere in society we can see people who are taking advantage of the weak, which is exactly what Laozi is talking about in the line "reducing [that which is, those which have] not enough in order to enrich [that which, those who] have surplus." The regulatory laws of nature are not like this; they take from what is abundant and use it to compensate what is not sufficient, and thereby maintain a principle of balancing according to the mean. The rules and laws of society should be effective in following the balancing according to the mean of the regulatory laws of nature, this is what Laozi means by having the Dao of humans (人道) follow the Dao of heaven (天道).

The period Laozi lived in faced serious political and social turmoil. The gap between the rich and the poor was growing wider, forceful annexations were happening more and more, no wonder Laozi sighed asking, "Of the rulers in the world, who can take their own surplus and give it to the poor?" Obviously, this wish is difficult to actually realize.

4 Tr. note: "Red-lacquered doors" refers to the wealthy and powerful families.

Seventy-Eight

天下莫柔弱於水，而攻堅強者莫之能勝，以其無以易之 (1)。
弱之勝強，柔之勝剛，天下莫不知，莫能行。
是以聖人雲：“受國之垢 (2)，是謂社稷主；受國不祥 (3)，是爲天下王。”
正言若反 (4)。

Nothing in the world is more gentle and weak than water, but nothing cannot surpass it in overcoming what is solid and strong, because there is nothing that can change it (以其无以易之) (1).

Weakness overcomes strength and gentleness overcomes solidity, this is known by everyone in the world, yet no one is able to practice it.

That is why the sage says: “Assume the *gou* 垢 [filth, disgrace] of the state (2), this is called being the host of the altars of grain and earth; assume *bu xiang* 不祥 [inauspicious] of the state (3), this is to be the king of all under heaven.” Right words seem contrary (正言若反) (4).

Commentary and Explanation

1) Because there is nothing that can change it (以其无以易之): In the received version, the character *yi* 以 [take, as, go by] before *qi* 其 [its, theirs] is missing. Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) notes: “Laozi often uses the combination *yi qi* 以其 [because of].” Its occurrence here can be verified through the *Boshu* 帛书 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*].
2) Assume the disgrace *gou* 垢 [filth, disgrace] of the state: Assume the disgrace of the entire country.
3) Assume the *bu xiang* 不祥 [inauspicious] of the state: Assume the misfortune of the entire country.

   Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) comments: “Whenever the *Laozi* uses words such as ‘bent’, ‘crooked’, ‘hollow’, ‘worn-out’, ‘deficient’, ‘female’, ‘gentle’, ‘weak’, ‘humble’, ‘decreased’, ‘sparing’, ‘kind’, ‘meager’, ‘secondary’, ‘inferior’, ‘orphaned’, ‘lonely’, and ‘having no possessions’, the text is referring to what is called ‘disgrace’ and ‘misfortune’ in this passage.”
4) Right words seem contrary (正言若反): Correct statements resemble factitious remarks.

   Heshang Gong 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) notes: “What is meant here is that people of the world remain oblivious to honest words and take them for abnormal pronouncements.”

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Shi Deqing 释德清 (d. 1623) comments: "These are the right words that conform to the Dao, but the ordinary people regard them as the opposite."

Gao Yandi 高延第 (d. 1886) comments: "This expression manages to clarify altogether the essential meaning of the mysterious language (玄言) used in both the upper and the lower chapters[1] of the *Laozi*. When we read throughout the different chapters of the *Laozi* 'when twisted it is whole, by *wang* 枉 [to bend, crooked] it is made straight', 'what is hollowed out becomes full, what is worn-out becomes new' (Chapter 22), 'the soft and weak overcomes the firm and strong' (Chapter 36), that 'life can endure if it is not benefited' (Chapter 55), that 'non-action and thereby nothing is not done' (Chapter 48), that 'not contending leads to a situation where none will contend' (Chapter 22), that 'those who know do not speak, and those who speak do not know' (Chapter 56), that 'decrease leads to increase and increase to decrease' (Chapter 42),[2] and the [aforementioned] words are paradoxical while the principles are established therein, all of this refers to what is called 'right words seem contrary' here."

Zhang Dainian 张岱年 (d. 2004) notes: "Contrary words are the right words. This also refers to the unity of opposites." (*Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中国哲学大纲 [*Outline of Chinese Philosophy*].)

Contemporary Translation

There is nothing more delicate in the world than water, but when it collides with the strength of objects, it cannot be defeated by anything, because nothing can take its place.

Weakness surpasses strength, what is yielding surpasses what is indomitable. This much is known by everyone in the world, yet there are none who can put it into practice.

Therefore, those who are in line with the Dao say: "Only if you take on the humiliation of the entire country can you become the ruler of the state, only if you take on the misfortune of the entire country can you become the sovereign of the world." What is expressed genuinely comes out as if it is the contrary.

1 Tr. note: This refers to the entire text, which can be differentiated as the *Dao jing* 道经 [*Classic of Dao*] and *De jing* 德经 [*Classic of Virtue*].

2 Tr. note: Some of these phrases differ slightly from our translations in their respective chapters due to context.

Argument

Laozi uses water as an example to illustrate the principle according to which what is yielding overcomes what is indomitable. Just look at rainwater dripping from the eaves little by little, which can perforate a huge boulder after continuing for years on end. Or consider a flood as it engulfs fields and houses and sweeps away bridges; there is not a single solid thing which can hold it back. That is why Laozi says that what is gentle and weak can overcome what is firm and strong. Obviously, when Laozi talks about "gentleness and weakness", this has nothing to do with feebleness and powerlessness in the usual sense, but rather has the connotation of something which is incomparably unflinching.

This chapter explains the function of gentleness and weakness by means of the example of water. By nature, water tends towards what is lowly and humble, which Laozi invokes to advocate the idea of being base and disgraceful, something which is derived from his notion of "not contending." In turn, the notion of "not contending" is meant to counter the selfish desire to possess things.

Seventy-Nine

和大怨，必有餘怨；[報怨以德 (1)，] 安可以爲善？
是以聖人執左契 (2)，而不責 (3) 於人。有德司契，無德司徹 (4)。
天道無親 (5)，常與善人。

When a great resentment has been assuaged, there will necessarily be residual resentment; [by repaying a resentment with *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy] (1)], how can one do good?

Therefore the sage holds fast to the *zuo* 左 [left] *qi* 契 [contract, agreement] (2), but does not *ze* 責 [demand, blame, reprove] (3) others. A person who possesses virtue takes charge of contracts, a person without virtue takes charge of *che* 徹 [pierce, thorough] (4).

The Dao of heaven has no kin (5), it is always in the company of good people.

Commentary and Explanation

1) By repaying a resentment with *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy]: This phrase originally appeared in Chapter 63, inserted here on the basis of the suggestions made by Chen Zhu 陈柱 (d. 1944) and Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999).

Yan Lingfeng comments: "The phrase 'repaying a resentment with virtue' is the text of Chapter 63, but does not correspond with the overall context of that chapter. Chen Zhu notes: "The phrase 'repaying a resentment with virtue' in Chapter 63 should be placed before the sentence 'when a great resentment has been assuaged, there will necessarily be residual resentment.'" Chen has a point, but the phrase should belong before the sentence 'how can one do good?' and after 'there will necessarily be residual resentment', so that the whole passage reads 'when a great resentment has been assuaged, there will necessarily be residual resentment, by repaying a resentment with virtue, how can one do good?'" Note: Yan's account is reliable. The phrase 'repaying a resentment with virtue' originally appeared in Chapter 63, but has nothing to do with the context of that chapter, which raises the suspicion that we are dealing with a misplaced passage from the current chapter. Moving it here makes the text coherent. The meaning of this passage is that when a great resentment has been resolved, it is unavoidable that there will still be

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some resentment left. Accordingly, Laozi argues that resolving resentment (avenging a resentment) by means of virtue is still not an adequate solution, and that ideally, one avoids provoking resentment on the part of the people in the first place. But how is that to be accomplished? Nothing more than governing through "serenity and non-assertive action"—namely what is referred to as "holding fast to the left side of the contract without exacting payment from the people" below in the text. By doing so, one can avoid creating resentment among the people. By contrast, if one practices a form of government which "takes charge of taxation", that is to say, which exploits the people, this is bound to give rise to great resentment on their part. In that case, even if one offers reconciliation through virtue, it is no longer an adequate solution.

2) *Zuo* 左 [left] *qi* 契 [contract, agreement]: *Qi* 契 [contract, agreement] means a written agreement, or what is nowadays called a "contract." In ancient times, contracts were carved in wood and cut apart in the middle, with each of the concerned parties holding on to one half, so that the authenticity of the contract could later be authenticated. The left side of the contract was signed by the debtor and handed over to the creditor for safekeeping, much like what we now call a receipt.

Gao Heng 高亨 (d. 1986) comments: "In the *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] it says: '*Qi* 契 [contract, agreement] means an important agreement. *Quan* 券 [certificate, ticket] means *qi* 契 [contract, agreement].' In ancient times, the right half of a written agreement was seen as more respectable. In the Chapter *Qu li* 曲礼 [*Summary of the Rites*] of the *Liji* 礼记 [*Book of Rites*] we read: 'The party that offers the grain holds on to the right half of the contract.' Zheng [Xuan] 郑 [玄] (d. 200) notes: '*Qi* 契 [contract, agreement] refers to [a kind of] important agreement, the right half [of this kind of agreement] is more respectable.' In the Chapter *Ding fen* 定分 [*Establishing the Duties*] of the *Shangzi* 商子 [*Writings of Master Shang*] it says: 'To officials who make inquiries about law and decrees the left half of the certificate is given, the officials in charge of laws and decrees should preserve the right half carefully in a wooden case and store it in a room.' In the Chapter *Han ce* 韩策 [*Strategies of Han*] of the *Zhan guo ce* 战国策 [*Strategies of the Warring States*] there is the following passage: '[Lord Ancheng 安成君 shall] hold on to the right half of the contract and require the sovereigns of Qin and Wei to return the favour to you).' The above examples prove our point. The part of an agreement kept by a sage should naturally be the more respectable one, so why does the text of the *Laozi* describe the sage as holding on to the left part of the contract? To answer this question, we

have to turn to Chapter 31, where it says, 'On auspicious occasions the left side is esteemed (尚), on mournful occasions the right side is esteemed'. The use of a written agreement in itself belongs to the category of auspicious occasions, which can account for why Laozi [also] sees the left half of a contract as respectable. Whether the left or the right half of a contract qualifies as respectable or menial varies according to the times and the circumstances. In the *Shuowen jiezi* it says: '*Ze* 责 [demand, blame, reprove] means to require.' Creditors hold on to the left half of the contract, debtors keep the right half. The creditor holds on to the left half in order to exact (责) payment from the debtor. The sage holds on to the left half of the contract without exacting payment; this means that he gives without asking for anything in return."

Note: The received versions have "left half of the contract," but the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version has "right half of the contract." According to Gao Ming 高明 (d. 2018), the A version should be adopted. He argues: "If we examine the meaning of the text, the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version argues, 'therefore holds on to the right half of the contract without exacting payment from the people', which means that the sage possesses the right half of the contract and has the right to exact payment but refrains from doing so, which means that he gives without asking for anything in return. This fits precisely with Laozi's notion of the dark virtue (玄德) of 'Generating without possessing…. Growing without dominating' (Chapter 51). The *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version reads 'he holds on to the left half', which does not make any sense. Although scholars throughout the ages have furnished all sorts of textual evidence and have come up with all sorts of interpretations [to justify this reading], it still does not fit with the basic orientation of the *Laozi*. This suffices to prove that the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version corresponds to the original text of the *Laozi* and that the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version as well as the received versions that have been transmitted to us contain a textual error here. In light of a textual study of the aforementioned ancient and contemporary editions, this passage in the *Laozi* should be corrected to read 'therefore the sage holds on to the right half of the contract without exacting payment from the people.' The right half of a contract is the more respectable part, and is preserved by the creditor. The left half has a subordinate function and is the part the debtor holds onto. The sage holds on to right half of the agreement without exacting payment from the other party, which means that he gives without asking for anything in return."

3) *Ze* 责 [demand, blame, reprove]: To exact payment. Refers to the fact that the creditor holds the left half of the contract in store in order to reclaim what is owed by the debtor.
4) Takes charge of *che* 彻 [pierce, thorough]: *Che* 彻 [pierce, thorough] refers to the tax law of the Zhou dynasty.
5) The Dao of heaven has no kin: The Dao of heaven is impartial. Corresponds to the notion that 'heaven and earth are not humane' in Chapter 5.

Gao Ming comments: "The *Laozi* invokes an old proverb at the end of this chapter: 'Now as for the Dao of heaven, it has no kin, and is constantly in the company of those who are good.' A similar saying appears in the *Cai Zhong zhi ming* 蔡仲之命 [*Mandate of Cai Zhong*] chapter of the *Zhoushu* 周书 [*Book of Zhou*] [in the *Shangshu* 尚书, *Book of Documents*]: 'Heaven in its greatness (皇天) remains impartial, assisting only those who are virtuous.' The good are teachers for the virtuous. Although these two sayings are similar in wording, they differ in meaning. In the *Laozi*, the idea of 'the Dao of heaven' contained in this old saying is used to clarify the regularity underlying the natural world, which is different from the notion of the 'mandate of Heaven' mentioned in the *Book of Zhou*."

Contemporary Translation

When one has peacefully resolved the cause of a grudge, there will always be some residual grudge left. [Using virtue to make amends for a grudge,] why should this be seen as the appropriate solution?

Therefore, the sage preserves proof for what he has loaned out, but does not exact payment from the people. A person who possesses virtue is as magnanimous as such a lender, a person without virtue is as unforgiving as someone in charge of collecting taxes.

The laws of nature are impartial and are always in the company of good people.

Argument

The intention of this chapter is to point out to those in power that they should make sure the people do not harbor ill will against them. Exploiting the common people through taxation and oppressing the multitudes through a punitive form of government is bound to create resentment among the people.

An ideal government transforms the people through "virtue", comes to their aid, gives freely without asking for anything in return, and refrains from harassing ordinary folks. This is what is meant by "holding on to the left side of a contract without exacting payment from the people."

The notion that "the Dao of heaven has no kin" is consistent with the idea that "heaven and earth are not humane" found in Chapter 5. Both phrases embody a dispassionate outlook on nature. In human psychology, we often encounter the phenomenon of "emotional transference." When people are feeling optimistic, it seems as though the flowers and trees are all smiling and nodding their heads at them in agreement, but when they are feeling depressed, they get the impression that the mountains and rivers and the whole face of the earth is suffused with sadness and gloom. In this way, subjective human emotions are projected onto external things and human feelings are attributed to the cosmos. Laozi on the other hand refrains from attributing human subjective emotions and intentions to objects, which is why he claims that the laws of nature are emotionally impartial (and do not extend emotional preference to particular things, the blooming of flowers and the falling of leaves for example merely counting as natural phenomena instead of being the result of any kind of emotional like or dislike). When the text says that "the Dao of heaven has no kin, it is always in the company of good people", this does not at all mean that there is an anthropomorphic heavenly Dao which helps human beings. Rather, it indicates that the reason why good people can find help is due to their own actions.

Eighty

小國寡民 (1)。使有什伯人之器 (2) 而不用；使民重死而不遠徙 (3)。雖有舟輿，無所乘之；雖有甲兵，無所陳之。使民 (4) 復結繩而用之。

甘其食，美其服，安其居，樂其俗。鄰國相望，雞犬之聲相聞，民至老死，不相往來。

A small state with few people (1). Provide them with *shi* 什 [ten, tenfold, various] *bai* 伯 [one hundred, a hundredfold] human instruments (2), but they will not use them. Teach the people to take death seriously, they will not be distant from [the idea of] emigration (不远徙) (3). Even though there are boats and carriages, no one boards them, even though there are shields and weapons, no one employs them. Let *min* 民 (the people) (4) return to the use of tying knots [instead of writing].

Make their food tasty, embellish their clothes, bring peace to their homes, and joy to their customs. Neighboring states are seen from a distance and people hear the other side's chickens and dogs, but they reach old age and die without having visited [the neighboring state].

Commentary and Explanation

1) A small state with few people: This is Laozi's idealized form of communal life on the basis of ancient rural society.

Tong Shuye 童书业 (d. 1968): "This is actually an idealized small-scale rural society which preserves the form of the archaic commune. Some people claim that Laozi attempts to return to primitive society, but this is not the case because he also maintains that there should be a 'state' and government. In such a society there are 'shields and weapons' and it is also able to 'make their food tasty and embellish their clothes.' All these are unlikely to be the phenomena of a primitive society. Laozi merely wants to bring stability to the small-scale peasant economy and make sure those in power do not harass the people. His goal is simply to allow such an economy to develop freely." (*Xianqin qi zi yanjiu* 先秦七子研究 [*A Study of Seven Pre-Qin Masters*], p. 135).

Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰 (d. 1990): "The 80th chapter of the *Laozi* depicts its ideal society. At first sight it appears to be a very primitive society, but that is not actually the case. It argues that in such a society 'even though there are boats and carriages, no one boards them. Even

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though there are shields and weapons, no one employs them. Let the people return to the use of tying knots [instead of writing].' Clearly in such a society, it is not that there are no boats and carriages, but rather that there is no occasion for using them. It is not as if there are no shields and weapons, but rather that there is no need to employ them on a battlefield. It is not that writing does not exist, but that there is no need for writing and people can go back to tying knots instead. The *Laozi* regards this as 'the utmost form of perfect governance.' This is not a primitive society at all, but rather, to borrow the *Laozi*'s expression, one that knows civilization and maintains simplicity. For the *Laozi*, with respect to so-called 'civilization', an ideal society is not where the unachievable is achieved, but where the achievable is unachieved. Accordingly, some might infer that what the *Laozi* describes in Chapter 80 is not about society, but about the human spiritual state. Indeed, it is about the state of the spirit, and what the *Laozi* aspires after is precisely this spiritual state."[1]

2) *Shi* 什 [ten, tenfold, various] *bai* 伯 [one hundred, a hundredfold] human instruments: Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) and others' versions have *shi bai zhi qi* 什伯之器 instead of *shi bai ren zhi qi* 什伯人之器. In Yan Zun's 严遵 (d. 41) and Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown) versions we find *shi bai ren zhi qi* 什伯人之器, as is also the case in the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] and *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] versions. According to Hu Shi's 胡适 (d. 1962) and Gao Ming's 高明 (d. 2018) remarks, the Heshang Gong edition should be followed here.

Hu Shi: "*Shi* 什 means 'tenfold', *bai* 伯 means 'a hundredfold.' Following the progress of civilization, manpower came to be replaced by mechanical power so that a single carriage could transport up to half a ton and a single boat could hold several thousand people. Carriages and boats with this much capacity were called 'instruments of tens and hundreds of people.' The passage 'even though there are boats and carriages, no one boards them. Even though there are shields and weapons, no one employs/deploys them' further explains this sentence."

Gao Ming: "*Shi bai ren zhi qi* 十百人之器 refers to machines with the power of tens and hundreds of people and not to weaponry, as Yu Yue 俞樾 (d. 1907) is alone in claiming. Further on in the text we read 'even though there are boats and carriages, no one boards them. Even though there are shields and weapons, no one employs/deploys them. Let the

1 Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) 冯友兰, *Zhongguo zhexue shi xin bian* 中国哲学史新编 [A New History of Chinese Philosophy] (Beijing: People's Press, 2001).

people return to the use of tying knots [instead of writing].' 'Boats and carriages' are means of transportation which one can use to travel for thousands of miles, something which would require the labor of tens and hundreds of people. 'Shields and weapons' refers to military equipment, which can be used in battle to withstand the power of tens and hundreds of people. This makes it clear that *shi* 十 means 'tenfold' and *bai* 百 means 'a hundredfold' and that 'instruments of tens and hundreds of people' refers to machines with a power equal to that of tens and hundreds of people."

3) Will not be distant from [the idea of] emigration (不远徙): The *Mawangdui* versions have "distant from [the idea of] emigration (远徙)."

   Xu Kangsheng 许抗生 (b. 1937): "The *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*) version reads 'distant from farewell (远送)', the *Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version reads 'distant from emigration.' I follow the latter version here. All other editions have 'will *not* be distant from emigration.' I suspect the word 'not (不)' was a later addition. *Zhong* 重 [to attach importance to] and *yuan* 远 [distance from, estrange] run parallel in this sentence and are both verbs. 'Distant from emigration' means regarding emigration as a remote matter and considering it as something inappropriate, meaning that one should not move to another place casually, but rather look upon moving from one place to another as a very serious matter."

4) *Min* 民 (the people): The Wang Bi version reads "humans (人)." In the *Quqie* 胠篋 [*Pilfering Chests*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] this sentence is quoted as saying "the people tied knots and used them." Here, the word "the people (民)" is used as well. The Mawangdui *Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version, Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639) version, the Jing Long 景龙 era stele version, Heshang Gong's version, as well as many other ancient editions all read "the people" instead of "humans". It ought to be changed here in order to maintain textual coherence.

Contemporary Translation

A state with a small territory and a small population. Even though there are contraptions with the power of tens and hundreds of people, they are not used. Let people look upon death as a grave matter and they will not move to distant places. Even though there are ships and carriages, there is no need to board them. Even though there is armory and weaponry, there is never any occasion to deploy them. Let the people return to keeping track of things by tying knots.

The people have tasty food, beautiful clothes, comfortable homes, and joyous customs. Neighboring states can see each other from a distance and the people can hear the sounds of each other's chickens and dogs, but they never go there and back again for as long as they live.

Argument

"A small state with few people" is a "Peach Blossom Spring" kind of ideal society which was motivated by a dissatisfaction with the reality and conceived on the basis of life in the scattered rural communities of Laozi's time.

In this little world, there is no need for an oppressive force to maintain social order and people can live in peace with each other simply by relying on their instinctual simplicity and honesty. A little world as such knows nothing of the disasters of war, of being forced to pay heavy taxes, or of an atmosphere of tyranny and cruelty. The ways of the people are simple and sincere and they are isolated from the harmful effects of civilization. As a result, the people are not anxious or restless, they are strangers to the feelings of fear and loss. Such a simple and uncomplicated community is actually an idealized description of rural life in antiquity. The ancient Chinese agricultural society was made up of countless autonomous and self-sufficient villages. Because of the difficulties in travelling from one village to another, each village had to be economically self-reliant. Thus, this utopian view reflects the decentralized nature of economic life in feudal society at that time.

Eighty-One

信言不美，美言不信 (1)。
善者不辯，辯者不善 (2)。
知者不博，博者不知。
聖人不積，既以爲人己愈有，既以與人己愈多。
天之道，利而不害；人之道 (3)，爲而不爭。

Credible words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not credible (1).

Those who are good do not quarrel, those who quarrel are not good (2).

Those who know are not erudite, those who are erudite do not know.

The sage does not accumulate, because he acts on behalf of others, he has more; because he gives to others, more will be his share.

The Dao of heaven brings benefit without harming; the Dao of human beings (3) acts without contending.

Commentary and Explanation

1) Credible words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not credible: "Credible words" refer to true statements, or words from one's inner heart. "Beautiful words" refers to beautified words, which constitute deceitful talk (see Shi Deqing's 释德清 (d. 1623) remarks).

Zhang Songru 张松如 (d. 1998): "The beginning of this chapter introduces the categories of the beautiful and the credible, the good and the quarrelsome, and the knowledgeable and the erudite, which actually raises a series of issues concerning the contradictory unity of the categories such as truth and falsity, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, and makes clear the inconsistency between the outside appearance and inner essence of certain things. This passage contains rich dialectical thought."

2) Those who are good do not quarrel, those who quarrel are not good: Some characters are missing from this sentence in the *Boshu jia* 帛书甲 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text A*)] version, but in the *Boshu yi* 帛书乙 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscript* (*text B*)] version it is fully intact and reads, "those who are good are not numerous/valuable (多), those who are numerous/valuable are not good." In both *Mawangdui* versions this sentence is placed after "those who know are not erudite, those who are erudite do not know."

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3) The Dao of human beings: Current editions have "the Dao of the sage." Here this is amended according to the Mawangdui *Silk Manuscript* (*text B*) version.

Contemporary Translation

True words are not beautified, beautified words are not true. People of good conduct do not engage in eloquent argumentation, people who engage in eloquent argumentation are not good.

People with genuine understanding do not have extensive knowledge, people with extensive knowledge have no genuine understanding.

A sage who is in line with the Dao does not accumulate on his own behalf, he helps others as much as he can, which allows him to be replenished. He gives as much as he can to others, which allows him to become more plentiful.

The laws of nature bring benefit to things without harming them. In human affairs, bestowing instead of contention.

Argument

The aphorisms in this chapter can be deemed the highest norms for human conduct. The first three sayings urge people towards honesty, caution in speech, and expertise. The latter four phrases encourage us to "benefit the people without contending."

Because true words are honest and straightforward, they are not beautified. Because beautified words are pleasing to the ear, they are often ostentatious and disingenuous.

The speech of good persons is aimed towards the principles [underlying things] and conforms to the reality, and consequently has no need for verbal ingenuity. The actions of good persons are sincere, deliberate, forthright, and free from deception, which is why they have no need to constantly justify themselves. By contrast, people who like to make their eloquent arguments heard try to cover up the deficiencies in their own words and actions.

"Those who know are not erudite, those who are erudite do not know." This sentence certainly applies to the contemporary academic world. In the modern world, intellectual activity has become more and more specialized and the age when "not knowing one thing is enough to shame a scholar (一事不知，儒者之耻)" is long gone. Those who consider themselves to be erudite usually

only have a superficial knowledge of each subject. Consequently, if a person pursues knowledge by dabbling in this and that and lacks focus, the gates of knowledge will forever remain closed to him.

"The sage does not accumulate, because he acts on behalf of others, he has more; because he gives to others, more will be his share." Here is an expression of the greatest form of love imaginable. Erich Fromm (d. 1980) once said "Love is the ability to nurture and to give." "Acting on behalf of others" and "giving to others" is a manifestation of such an ability to give. The greatness of the sage consists in the fact that he is constantly helping others, and is not selfishly attached to what he owns, which is precisely what is meant by "acting without contending." Laozi was acutely aware of the fact that the confusion in the world has its origin in the struggle between human beings—struggles for fame, fortune, success, and so on—who are ceaselessly striving for their selfish desires. He put forward the notion of "not contending" in order to get rid of such social conflicts. Laozi's notion of "not contending" does not at all mean something like renouncing oneself or losing oneself in depression and despondency. Instead, he wants people to "act," to develop their abilities to the utmost while following what is natural and self-so. What they gain through their own efforts, however, should not be claimed as their own exclusive possession. This spirit of devotion to others ("acting on behalf of others," "giving to others," "benefiting the ten thousand things") and of not vying with others for success or fame constitutes one of the greatest forms of moral conduct.

APPENDIX

Major Commentators on the *Laozi*

1 Pre-Qin to Sui

Han Fei 韩非 (*d. 233 BCE*)

i The *Jie Lao* 解老 [*Explaining the Laozi*] Chapter of the *Hanfeizi*

Among extant explications of Laozi's thought, *Jie Lao* is the earliest text we have. This exegesis of quotes from the *Laozi* is included as a chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*].

Jie Lao interprets and explains passages from the following chapters of the received text of the *Laozi*: 1, 14, 38, 46, 50, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, 67, although not in that order. From Han Fei's selection and arrangement of passages, as well as the content of his explication, we find an interesting characteristic: among the two volumes that comprise the *Laozi*—the *Daojing* 道经 [*Classic of the Way*] and the *Dejing* 德经 [*Classic of Efficacy*], which taken together form the alternative title of *Daodejing* 道德经 [*Classic of the Way and Virtue*]—Han Fei lays stronger emphasis on chapters from the *Dejing* (that is, Chapters 38–81 of the received *Laozi*). Moreover, Han Fei also stresses Laozi's philosophy of life and political philosophy. Within the text of *Jie Lao*, we find little emphasis on Laozi's metaphysical thinking. Rather, Han Fei focuses on utility and efficacy, and therefore *Jie Lao* engages and develops this aspect of Laozi's thought.

There is an instance in which *Jie Lao* clearly distorts and appropriates the *Laozi*'s original meaning, and another in which it misinterprets the *Laozi*. These are as follows:

1. Han Fei writes, "Repeatedly changing the law while governing a large country makes the lives of the people harsh. This means that a ruler who follows the Dao values emptiness and tranquility while approaching changes to the law with solemn wariness." Han Fei's claim that Laozi advocates "approaching changes to the law with solemn wariness" (重变法) is a clear distortion of Laozi's thought. As Wang Li 王力 (d. 1986) states in *Laozi yanjiu* 老子研究 [*Research on the Laozi*], "[Han] Fei discusses 'approaching changes to the law with solemn wariness,' and this is serious violation of the purport of Lao Dan 老聃 (one appellation for the historical figure of Laozi, discussed in the Introduction). As this thought was about eliminating the human law [so as to follow the self-so], how could it be possible to advocate changes to it with solemn wariness?"

2. Han Fei explains the phrase "of ten there are three (十有三)" as meaning "thirteen" in the line "The follower of life, of ten there are three, the follower of death, of ten there are three" from Chapter 50 of the *Laozi*. This, he believes, refers to the four

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limbs and nine cavities, and he thus derives his misreading by adding the four limbs and nine cavities together, which happens to amount to exactly "thirteen." However, "ten having three" refers not to "thirteen" but rather to the idea of "three out of ten," or thirty percent. Wang Bi's 王弼 (d. 249) commentary here accurately reflects this. He writes, "'Ten having three' is alike to saying 'three parts out of ten.'"

In another instance, Han Fei states, "The Way is comparable to water. If a drowning person drinks excessively of it, he will die; If a thirsty person drinks the right amount of it, he will live.... Thus, obtaining it one may bring death, and yet obtaining it may bring life; obtaining it may bring failure, and yet obtaining it may bring success." The *Laozi*, however, claims that only through the Dao are the myriad things generated and develop—that is, it only gives life and helps things achieve success. It does not associate "death" and "failure" with acquisition or alignment with the Dao. This passage from Han Fei can thus only be seen as portraying his own conceptions, which are unrelated to Laozi's thought.

Despite these two instances of misleading interpretation, *Jie Lao* gives us many accurate and insightful explications. Here I will focus specifically on Han Fei's comments regarding the Dao and *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power].

Regarding the Dao, Han Fei holds that "the Dao is that by which the myriad things are as they are, and that in the myriad principles (万理) are hoarded/dwell (稽).... The myriad things each have their own different principles, while the Dao hoards up the principles of the myriad things." This asserts the Dao to be the common principle of all things, which is also their universal pattern or regularity. The conception of the Dao Han Fei gives here refers principally to its regularity.

Han Fei also writes that "the Dao is that by which the myriad things are completed (成)." Here, Han Fei's discussion of the Dao refers principally to its generation and fostering the development of the myriad things. This is also the metaphysical conception of the Dao as true existence.

Regarding *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power]: Han Fei tells us, "*De* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] is the efficacy of the Dao." That is to say, *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] is the functioning of the Dao. This explanation is quite straightforward and clear.

Moreover, Han Fei's explication of the character *se* 嗇 [frugal, parsimonious] in Chapter 59 is particularly on the mark. He defines this term as "a stint (爰) of spirit," further telling us, "The sage's use of spirit is tranquil; and through being tranquil is not wasteful, and through being not wasteful is *se* 嗇 [frugality, parsimonious]." Laozi's conceptions of *se* 嗇 [frugality, parsimonious] and *jian* 俭 [frugal, economical, restrained] are interrelated. Both refer to treasuring spirit and thus not wasting spiritual energy. On this point, Han Fei's explication far surpasses those of later commentators who often misunderstood *se* 嗇 [frugality, parsimonious] and *jian* 俭 [frugal, economical, restrained] to refer exclusively to frugality in terms of money and wealth.

ii The *Yu Lao* 喻老 [*Illustration of the Laozi*] Chapter of the *Hanfeizi*

Overall, the text of *Jie Lao* is quite valuable as an explication of the *Laozi*, whereas the *Yu Lao* hugely misconstrues its meaning. This has led some scholars to suspect that these two chapters of the *Hanfeizi* were not authored by the same hand. (As Wang Li tells us, "The *Jie Lao* is abundant in prudent and well-thought words, while the *Yu Lao* is crude and superficial, thereby missing the profound meaning of the original text. They therefore were likely penned by two different authors.")

Yu Lao employs historical figures and stories to illustrate its misleading interpretations of the *Laozi* throughout. As Wang Li has written, "Han Fei was fond of teachings regarding punishment (刑), names (名), laws (法), and tactics (术), and therefore endorsed authoritarian ruling (or rulership). His authorship of *Yu Lao* gives a strained interpretation of the *Laozi* following this line of thought." The crudest misrepresentations of Laozi's thought found in *Yu Lao* are the following:

1. *For restraint to occur in oneself is considered heaviness; to not stray from one's position is considered tranquility. Heaviness makes one capable of commanding those who are light; tranquility makes one capable of commanding the impetuous.... Those without power of position* (势) *are called light; those who stray from their positions are called impetuous. This gives rise to obscurity and thereby death. It is thus said* [in the *Laozi*]: *'Through lightness one loses one's ministers; through impetuousness one loses one's rulership.' This can be said to describe Zhao Yong* 赵雍 (d. 295 BCE).

This interpretation clearly explicates the *Laozi* in a manner that supports Han Fei's own teachings, which emphasize that a ruler should be careful not to stray from his position, nor give up the power derived through it.

2. *Heavy power of position is the depth of rulership. The ruler is the one with heavy power of position among the ministers. Once this is lost, it cannot be regained.... Reward and punishment are the sharp instruments of the state. When they belong to the ruler, there is institutionalization of his rulership; when they belong to the ministers, there is the prevailing over the ruler by the ministers. When the ruler presents rewards, the ministers reduce this to the enactment of virtue; when the ruler presents punishments, the ministers augment this so as to see it as authority.*

This passage shows reward and punishment by the ruler to be the effective instruments of governance. Subordinates are not to be given access to them, as this would imperil the power and position of the ruler.

3. *The King of Yue* 越 (Gou Jian 勾践, d. 465 BCE) *served as slave in the state of Wu* 吴, *where he directed its attack on the state of Qi* 齐 *in order to weaken Wu. Wu forces defeated the Qi troops at Ailing* 艾陵, *and expanded to the Jiang* 江 *river and Ji* 济 *river while growing strong in Huangchi* 黄池. *The King of Yue was therefore able to defeat Wu forces at Wuhu* 五湖. *It is thus said* [in the *Laozi*]: *'If* [one] *wants to xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate] *zhi* 之 [it, that], *must gu* 固 [solid, abide by, necessarily] *extend it; if* [one] *wants to weaken it,* [*one*] *must strengthen it.' Duke Xian* 献 *of Jin* 晋 *desired to attack the state of Yu* 虞, *and gave them jade and horses. Count Zhi* 知伯 *planned to attack the state*

of Chouyou 仇由, *and gave them broad carriages. It is thus said* [in the *Laozi*]*: 'if* [one] *wants to qu* 取 [take, gain] *it*, [one] *must first yu* 与 [give, provide] *it.'*

This tells us that if we wish to destroy another state, we must first make them appear to "expand" and "grow strong" while keeping oneself unexposed so as to appear weaker than them. It also tells us that, if we desire to take possession of another state, we should first present them with gifts of wealth so as to show friendship, which will create the opportunity to attack successfully once they have lowered their guard.

4. *The state of Zhou* 周 *owned a jade tablet. When the tyrant King Zhou* 纣 *commanded Jiao Ge* 胶鬲 *to acquire it from them, King Wen* 文 *of the state of Zhou refused to hand it over. King Zhou's minister Fei Zhong* 费仲 *then came to request the tablet, and King Wen therefore gave it to him. This is because Jiao Ge was noble and Fei Zhong was without the Dao. The state of Zhou disliked allowing noble ministers achieve their ambitions, and therefore gave the tablet to Fei Zhong. King Wen promoted the Supreme Duke from the banks of the Wei* 渭 *river because he valued him. He invested the jade tablet in Fei Zhong so as to show love for him. It is thus said* [in the *Laozi*]*: 'When one does not value one's teacher and does not love one's investments, then even with knowledge one is still greatly lost. This is called the essential profundity.'*

This tells us that, if one desires to conquer another state, one should first target that state's noble ministers as well as ingratiate oneself with that state's corrupt ministers.

Above we see the various assertions of Han Fei's Legalist thought derived through his misappropriation of passages from the *Laozi*. They all advocate manipulation of one's situation through the use of scheming and other deceitful techniques, which entirely misconstrues Laozi's original meaning. Laozi's own thought could be said to contain not even the slightest trace of such manipulative use of power. It is clear, in fact, that Laozi himself was extremely opposed to the calculated and self-serving use of cleverness and trickery. Unfortunately, the misrepresentation of Laozi's thought given in *Yu Lao* has fed the widespread misunderstanding of later generations. We can even see the author of *Yu Lao* as the earliest of these misinterpretations of Laozi. (In *Zhuang-Lao tongbian* 庄老通辨, Qian Mu 钱穆 [d. 1990] repeatedly misinterprets the *Laozi* in this way. This is the result of a lack of in-depth examination of Laozi's teachings. It draws speculative inferences based on overly literal readings of the subtle and idiosyncratic language of the *Laozi*. It fails to grasp a deeper understanding of Laozi's comprehensive systematic philosophy as well as his aims in putting forth this philosophy.)

Yan Zun 严遵 (*d. 41*) Daode zhigui lun 道德指归论 [On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De]

Yan Zun lived in the reign of Han Chengdi 汉成帝 (d. 7 BCE). The *Daode zhigui lun* 道德指归论 [*On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De*] is an ancient commentary on the *Laozi*.

Originally the *Daode Zhigui Lun* 道德指归论 [*On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De*] had thirteen sections, divided into two parts, namely, "On Dao (道论篇)" and "On De

(德论篇)." During the period of the Chen dynasty (557–589) and Sui dynasty (581–619), the entire "On Dao (道论篇)" section was lost, so we only have the seven sections from "On De (德论篇)." Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰 (d. 1999) recovered the lost "On Dao (道论篇)" on the basis of Chen Jingyuan's 陈景元 (d. 1094) *Daode zhenjing cangshi zuan wei pian* 道德真经藏室纂微篇 [*Compiling the Subtlety of a Private Collection of the Genuine Daodejing*].

The *Daode zhigui lun* 道德指归论 [*On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De*] is a Huang-Lao interpretation of the *Laozi*.

Ge Xuan 葛玄 (*d. 244*), Laozi jiejie 老子节解 [A Sectional Explanation of the Laozi]

Ge Xuan, also known as Ge Xiangong 葛仙公 ("Immortal Lord"), was a popular figure in Daoist alchemy. He studied spirits and mountain spirits, guiding energy, vital breath, nurturing life, and related skills. Much of his commentary to the *Laozi* is a perversion of the text. A series of examples can be given:

To "makes the people not be robbers" from Chapter 3 Ge comments: "This talks about not letting evil *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] come, [it is like saying] not allowing 'robbers' and 'thieves' to enter, carrying out and consistently holding fast, then evil *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] will leave."

To "heaven lasts and the earth endures" from Chapter 7 Ge comments: "The lasting of heaven refers to the clayey ball,[1] the enduring of earth refers to the elixir field.[2] The clayey ball descends to the dark-red feast,[3] and the elixir field ascends to move as one. The vital *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] from the upper and lower body flow through the hundreds of joints, [so the entire body] soaks in harmonious *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]. The great way of self-generating is accomplished, therefore it speaks of 'living long' (长生)."

To "the highest good is to be like water" from Chapter 8 Ge comments: "The good here refers to the body fluid inside the mouth [i.e. saliva]. Gargle with it inside the mouth, then the sweet spring streams, swallow it and it goes down to order and/or arrange the ten thousand spirits. If you want to practice this [Daoist self-cultivation], gargle [with saliva in] the flowery pool[4] every morning, when this body fluid is mouthfull, raise your head and swallow it, so as to benefit the ten thousand spirits and increase the essential *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material]."

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1 Tr. note: *Ni-wan* 泥丸 or "the clay ball" is a Daoist alchemical term. It refers to a soft ball-like thing located in the center of the human brain, where the human spirit is believed to sit.

2 Tr. note: *Dan-tian* 丹田 or "elixir field" is a Daoist alchemical term. It usually refers to a region 1.3 Chinese inches below the navel.

3 Tr. note: *Jiang-yan* 绛宴 or "dark-red feast" is likely to refer to *jiang-gong* 绛宫 or "dark-red palace" which is a more common Daoist alchemical term referring to the heart.

4 Tr. note: *Hua-chi* 华池 or "flowery pool" is a Daoist alchemical term. It refers to the mouth.

To "profound and dark, yet there is seminal material in its midst" Ge comments: "This is called the vital *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] in one's brain, transforming into essence (精)."

The entire commentary is about nurturing life and breathing.

Wang Bi (*d. 249*), Daode zhenjing zhu 道德真经注 [Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing]

Wang Bi's commentary is, without doubt, a first-rate work. It does well to grasp what Laozi means by "*ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]." He fastens onto a few of the foundational concepts in Laozi's philosophy, adding his own interpretation. The methodology employed by Wang Bi is one common among Wei-Jin Xuanxue thinkers, namely "distinguishing names and analyzing principles (辨名析理)." "Distinguishing names (辨名)" means distinguishing between different meanings of names. A name represents concepts, analyzing these concepts is what is meant by "analyzing principles (析理)." Employing this methodology Wang Bi not only accurately explained the original meaning of the words in Laozi's philosophy, but also incisively developed and elaborated the ideas of Laozi's philosophy. In order to demonstrate the merits and characteristics of Wang Bi's commentary, the following quotes are taken from his text and given brief explanations.

In Chapter 3 of the *Laozi* we read: "Constantly make the people have no knowledge, no desire (常使民无知无欲)."

Wang Bi comments: "holding fast to their genuineness (守其真也)."

Chen Guying: "To explain this according to the characters [i.e. literally], it is quite easy to have people misunderstand, thinking that Laozi wanting people to be without knowledge and desire is a type of obscurantism. Actually the 'knowledge' and 'desire' Laozi talks about here has a particular meaning. 'Knowledge' here particularly refers to the type of intelligence that invites deceit, and 'desire' particularly refers to the type of lust for struggle and stealing. Laozi thinks that this kind of 'knowledge' and 'desire' produces the root source of all sorts of (bad) scheming and controversies. 'No knowledge and no desires' advises one to extinguish deceitful/scheming intelligence and contending desire and maintain a life brilliant with natural genuineness, being pure and simple. Wang Bi's use of the word 'genuine' excellently and concisely demonstrates a solid grasp of the meaning of making the people have no knowledge and no desire (使民无知无欲)."

In Chapter 5 of the *Laozi* we read: "The heavens and earth are not humane (天地不仁)."

Wang Bi comments: "Heaven and earth allow things to follow their natural bent and neither engage in conscious effort nor production, leaving the myriad things to manage themselves. Thus they 'are not humane'. The humane have to produce, establish, employ [rules, laws, policies, institutions, etc.] and transform [the beneficiaries],

exemplifying kindness and achievement. But with [these activities of] producing, establishing, employing, and transforming, people lose their genuineness … (天地任自然，无为无造，万物自相治理，故不仁也。仁者必造立施化，有恩有为；造立施化，则物失其真 ……)."[5]

Chen Guying: Here we can see that Wang Bi is very good at bearing out the *Laozi*'s basic spirit of simply going by naturalness or self-so (自然) and free development.

In Chapter 14 of the *Laozi* we read: "The shape without shape, the image without semblance (无状之状，无物之象)."

Wang Bi comments: "You might wish to say that it does not exist, but everything achieves existence because of it, and then you might wish to say that it does exist, but we do not see its form. This is why the text refers to it as 'the shape without shape, the image without semblance' (欲言 '无' 邪！而物由以成；欲言 '有' 邪！而不见其形. 故曰 '无状之状，无物之象也。')."[6]

Chen Guying: This chapter talks about the Dao. "*Wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" and "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]" both indicate the Dao. Wang Bi not only concisely and clearly explains the concept of "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" and "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]," but also explains why Laozi uses these concepts. Based on Wang Bi's interpretive commentary, we clearly know that, because we cannot see any shape of the Dao, we use "*wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]" to describe it. Moreover, this Dao without any form or shape is exactly that which produces all things, so we can also call it "*you* 有 [presence, having, being]."

In Chapter 20 of the *Laozi* we read: "The majority of people are content and happy (众人熙熙)."

Wang Bi comments: "Common people, befuddled by praise and advancement and excited by honor and reward, let their desires advance and their heart-minds contend (众人迷于美进，惑于荣利，欲进心竞，故熙熙如享太牢。)."[7]

Chen Guying: Wang Bi's commentary here is vivid and beautiful.

In Chapter 25 of the *Laozi* we read: "The Dao follows *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] (道法自然)."

Wang Bi comments: "The Dao does not act contrary to *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously], and thereby obtains its *xing* 性 [nature, inclinations, natural constitution].

Those who follow *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] as square, they then follow squareness, as circles, they then follow circleness, nothing done in

5 Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 60; translation modified.

6 Ibid., 73; translation modified.

7 Ibid., 84; translation modified.

opposition to *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] (道不违自然，乃得其性；法自然者，在方而法方，在圆而法圆，于自然无所违也。)."

Chen Guying: The line "the Dao follows *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] (道法自然)" often confuses people. The Dao is the ultimate concept in Laozi's philosophy; everything results from the Dao, So, why then does the Dao still have to model itself on *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]? Actually, "the Dao follows *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] (道法自然)" expresses exactly what Wang Bi says with "the Dao does not act contrary to *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]," which is to say that the operation and function of the Dao is naturally following *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously].

In Chapter 27 of the *Laozi* we read: "One who excels at walking leaves no traces; one who excels at speaking makes no mistakes; one who excels at calculating does not use counters; one who excels at locking uses no bolts, yet it cannot be opened; one who is good at tying uses no rope, yet it cannot be untied (善行无辙迹，善言无瑕讁；善数不用筹策；善闭无关楗而不可开，善结无绳约而不可解。)."

Wang Bi comments: "Following *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] and going [traveling/walking][8] on, not creating or starting; ... following the *xing* 性 [nature, inclinations, natural constitution] of things, not differentiating or analyzing; ... going by the number of things, not their external forms; going by the *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] of things, not devising or implementing.... These five all speak of not creating or implementing, following the *xing* 性 [nature, inclinations, natural constitution] of things, and not going by external forms to manipulate things (顺自然而行，不造不施 ..... 顺物之性，不别不析 ..... 因物之数，不假形也；因物之数，不假形也 ..... 五者，皆言不造不施，因物之性，不以形制物也。)."

Chen Guying: Wang Bi firmly grasps Laozi's basic concepts of "following *ziran* 自然 [self-so], nature, naturally, spontaneously]" and "following the *xing* 性 [nature, inclinations, natural constitution] of things." These concepts are dispersed throughout the entire *Laozi*. For example, in Chapter 29 Wang Bi comments: "All things take *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] as their nature *xing* 性 [nature, inclinations, natural constitution] (万物以自然为性)." And "Sages arrive at the utmost of *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously], and uninhibitedly [go by the] condition (情) of all things (圣人达自然之至，畅万物之情)." Wang Bi thoroughly understands the foundational spirit of Laozi's "free (自由)"[9] philosophy, and also elaborates and develops it.

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8 Tr. note: *Xing* 行 can also mean "act" or "do."

9 Tr. note: "Free" or *ziyou* 自由 can be read here as literally "going by oneself" or "going by one's own natural tendencies (性/情)."

In Chapter 36 of the *Laozi* we read: "Fish cannot leave the depths of a deep pool, the sharp instruments (利器) of a state cannot be shown to people (鱼不可脱于渊，国之利器不可以示人。)."

Wang Bi comments: "Sharp instruments are instruments used to profit the state. Act only in accordance with the *xing* 性 [nature, inclinations, natural constitution] of the people and do not rely on punishments to keep them in order. It is by ensuring that these devices cannot be seen, thus allowing everyone to obtain his proper place, that they are the 'sharp instruments' of the state. Disclosing them to the people means relying on punishment. If one tries to use punishment to profit the state, it will mean loss. If fish escape to the depths, they are certainly lost. If it is as devices used to profit the state that one establishes punishments and as such discloses them to the people, this will also surely mean loss (利器，利国之器也。唯因物之性，不假形以理物。器不可睹，而物各得其所，则国之利器也。示人者，任刑也。刑以利国，则失矣。鱼脱於渊，则必见失矣。利国器而立刑以示人，亦必失也。)."[10]

Chen Guying: Many people wrongly take "sharp instruments (利器) of a state cannot be shown to people" to mean political trickery, but after reading Wang Bi's commentarial explanation we realize that Laozi's actual meaning is to warn people that rulers cannot "establish punishments and disclose them to people." Reading this section of Wang Bi's commentary, not only helps one not misunderstand Laozi's thought on power, but also allows for a deep understanding of how Laozi sharply opposed harsh laws and cruel punishment.

In Chapter 65 of the *Laozi* we read: "Those of the past able to practice the Dao (道), did not use it to *ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever] the people, but they used it to make them *yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupidity] (古之善为道者，非以明民，将以愚之。)."

Wang Bi comments: "'*Ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever]' means full of craft and cunning, hiding what is pure. '*Yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupidity]' speaks to not knowing and preserving genuineness allowing one to follow *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] ('明' 谓多见巧诈，蔽其朴也。'愚' 谓无知守真顺自然也。)."

Chen Guying: Laozi's idea that "[Those of the past] did not use it to *ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever] the people, but they used it to make them *yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupidity]" is generally misunderstood as obscurantism. Reading Wang Bi's commentary allows us to understand that Laozi does not advocate any type of obscurantism. In Laozi's philosophy, *yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupidity] has special meaning—it is related to "pure (朴)," "genuine (真)," and [being] "*ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]." Laozi not only wants to make people

10 Ibid., 116; translation modified.

genuine and pure (*yu* 愚 [fool, foolishness, unsophisticated, ignorant, stupidity]), but also wants to persuade rulers themselves to first be genuine and pure.

The above quotations from Wang Bi's commentary show us that Wang Bi understood the authentic meaning of Laozi's philosophy quite well. Wang Bi is indeed the first hero of *Laozi* research.

Wang Bi's commentary to the *Laozi* and Guo Xiang's 郭象 (d. 312) commentary to the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], are both classics. While Wang Bi's commentary has been greatly useful and influential, it still contains mistakes we need to investigate to prevent misunderstandings. In what follows, we will be looking at mistakes in Wang Bi's commentary, as well as incorrect and missing characters in his version of the *Laozi* text.

We will start with the mistakes:

> In Chapter 5 of the *Laozi* we read: "Heaven and earth are not humane (仁), they take all things as straw dogs (天地不仁，以万物为刍狗)."

Wang Bi comments: "The earth did not generate fodder for animals, yet animals eat fodder; [it] did not generate dogs for humans, yet humans eat dogs (地不为兽生刍，而兽食刍；不为人生狗，而人食狗)."

Chen Guying: "Straw dogs (刍狗)" are dogs made of grass and used during ceremonies. The *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] describes this use. Wang Bi misunderstands and takes "straw dogs (刍狗)" as two things, namely "fodder and dogs (刍与狗)."

In Chapter 30 of the *Laozi* we read: "When the Dao is used to assist the people's sovereign, one does not overpower the world with armies. Such affairs are bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back] (以道佐人主者，不以兵强天下。其事好还。)."

Wang Bi comments: "One who has the Dao wants to assist things to return to '*wu-wei* 无为 [non-action, non-assertive action]', thereby the text says that he pursues a return to what is good (有道者务欲还反'无为'，故云其事好还也。)."

Chen Guying: Wang Bi's explanation is exactly the opposite of the original meaning of the *Laozi*. "Such affairs are bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back]" means that when employing soldiers, this type of thing will see pay-back. "Bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back]" connotes the sense of "pay-back" and "revenge." As Li Xizhai 李息斋 (d. 1312) writes, "If you kill someone's father, they will kill your father, kill someone's brother, they will kill your brother, this is called 'bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back]'." Or as Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (d. 1271) puts it, "I hurt someone, they will hurt me, thus it is called 'bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back]'." "Bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back]" refers to "revenge" in the above quotes, and it implies the idea of reaping the (bad) fruit of one's own action—it does not mean returning to "*wu-wei* 无为 [non-action, non-assertive action]."

In Chapter 36 of the *Laozi* we read: "If [one] wants to *xi* 歙 [inhale, accumulate] *zhi* 之 [it, that], they must *gu* 固 [solid, abide by, necessarily] extend it; if [one] wants to weaken it, they must strengthen it; if [one] wants to *fei* 废 [abandon, waste] it, they must *ju* 举 [raise, promote] it; if [one] wants to *qu* 取 [take, gain] it, they must first *yu* 与 [give, provide] it (将欲歙之，必固张之；将欲弱之，必固强之；将欲废之，必固兴之；将欲夺之，必固与之。)."

Wang Bi comments: "If you would remove the dangerously bold and get rid of the rebellious, you should do so by these four methods. Take advantage of the nature of the person involved (going by the nature of things [因物之性]), allow them to destroy themselves, and do not rely on punishments as the major means to get rid of such harmful elements (将欲除强梁、去暴乱，当以此四者。因物之性，令其自戮，不假刑为大以除将物也。)."[11]

Chen Guying: Here Laozi is explaining how things change into their opposite when they become extreme. Wang Bi's commentary and Laozi's original meaning do not meet eye-to-eye. Even though this is the case, Wang Bi's idea of "take advantage of the nature of the person involved (going by the nature of things [因物之性])" does not count as being contrary to Laozi's major idea concerning revering *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously], so it is unlike many other scholars who wrongly take this section to be about political trickery.

In Chapter 57 of the *Laozi* we read: "Govern the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify], employ military means with *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular], (以正治国，以奇用兵)."

Wang Bi comments: "To govern the state with the Dao means to focus on the root (the fundamental) and not on the branch tips (the trivial). To govern the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify] means to establish the less relevant and focus on the trivial. Since the fundamental is not established and the trivial benefits little, the common folk are not benefited [by this sort of governance]. This is why things will surely develop to the point where the ruler will 'use the military with perversity.' 以道治国, 崇本以息末, 以正治国, 立辟以攻末, 本不立而末浅, 民无所及, 故必至于奇用兵也。)."[12]

Chen Guying: "Govern the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify], employ military means with *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular], (以正治国，以奇用兵)" are parallel expressions. But Wang Bi reads them as sequential, arguing that "governing the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify]" leads to "employing military means with *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular]." Wang Bi [mistakenly] interprets "govern the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify]" as "establish the less relevant and focus on the trivial" which is perplexing. Chapter 45

11 Ibid., 115; translation modified.

12 Ibid., 158; translation modified.

reads, "Tranquil and calm (静), to make straight (正) all under heaven". In this chapter we have "I delight in stillness (静), and the people rectify (正) themselves;" both take *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify] and *jing* 静 [tranquil, still, calm] as mutually elaborating on one another. Laozi advocates ordering the state through being pure (清) and *jing* 静 [tranquil, still, calm], so he naturally also advocates ordering the state through *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify]. Clearly Wang Bi's commentary [on this passage] is not fitting.

In Chapter 58 of the *Laozi* we read: "What is regular becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular], what is good becomes *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy]. The delusion of human beings has certainly been around for a long time. And so the sages are square but do not cut, they are *lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] without *gui* 刿 [to cut, injure] (正复为奇，善复为妖。人之迷，其日固久。是以圣人方而不割，廉而不刿)."

Chen Guying: Wang Bi's commentary is full of mistakes in this section. Below we will go over them one by one.

To "what is regular becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular]" Wang Bi comments: "Using *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify] to order the state will become reverting (复) to using *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular] to employ the military (以正治国，则便复以奇用兵矣)."

Chen Guying: Wang Bi's misinterpretation here is the same as that in his commentary to Chapter 57, where he mistakenly argues that "governing the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify]" leads to "employing military means with *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular]." Actually "what is regular becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular]" only describes the changing condition or state of things and affairs.

To "what is good becomes *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy]" Wang Bi comments: "If one establishes goodness to bring harmony to all things, it easily reverts to the disastrous advent of *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy] (立善以和万物，则便复有妖之患也。)."[13]

Chen Guying: "What is good becomes *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy]" is the same as "what is regular becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful, unusual, irregular];" both describe the principle or pattern (理) of how things cycle and generate one another.

To "the delusion of human beings has certainly been around for a long time" Wang Bi comments: "In other words, the people in their doubt and confusion have lost the Dao for such a long time that one cannot easily make them behave responsibly by controlling them with correctness (正) and goodness (言人之迷惑失道，故久矣，不可便正善以责)."

13 Ibid., 161; translation modified.

Chen Guying: "The delusion of human beings has certainly been around for a long time" goes with the previous two lines [as it is discussing the same thing]. It means that correctness (正) can suddenly turn into wickedness (邪) (or wickedness can suddenly turn into correctness), goodness can suddenly turn into badness (badness can suddenly turn into goodness). People are confused and ignorant of this type of principle or pattern (理) of how things cycle and rely on one another, even though it has been quite a while.

To "they are *lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] without *gui* 刿 [to cut, injure]" Wang Bi comments: "'*Lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp]' means honest and pure (清廉). '*Gui* 刿 [to cut, injure]' means injure or wound. Purifying (清) the people with honesty (清廉), leading away their evils, leading away their filth, not using honesty (清廉) to hurt things."

Chen Guying: *Lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] means sharp, as both the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] and the *Xunzi* 荀子 [*Writings of Master Xun*] note.[14] "*Lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] without *gui* 刿 [to cut, injure]" is an ancient idiom, which means being sharp without hurting people. Wang Bi taking *lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] to mean honest (清廉) is wrong.

In Chapter 72 of the *Laozi* we read: "Only without *yan* 厌 [loath, disgusted] (夫唯不厌)."

Wang Bi comments: "Not self-loathing (自讨) (不自讨也)."

Chen Guying: Here "*yan* 厌 [loath, disgusted]" means "pressure." The *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*] explains "*yan* 厌 [loath, disgusted] as *ze* 笮 [tight, narrow, confined]." This sentence is then reminding rulers not to pressure or confine the people.

Above we looked at Wang Bi's mistakes.

Below we will look at corrections to mistakes in his version of the *Laozi*. Wang Bi separates the text into 81 chapters, and most scholars follow him. Today's received version, and the most common version, is Wang Bi's, but it is a corrupted and differs from Wang's original version. According to Heshang Gong's 河上公 (1st century CE; dates unknown), Fu Yi's 傅奕 (d. 639), and the *Boshu* 帛书 [Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts] editions, as well as other ancient versions, corrections to Wang's version should be as follows:

> Chapter 2: "Long and short other *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite] each other *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite] (长短相较)" [in Wang Bi's version] should be: "long and short *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape] each other (长短相形)."
>
> According to Bi Yuan 毕沅 (d. 1797), there is no *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite] in the ancient text, nor is it found in Heshang Gong's and Fu Yi's versions. Moreover,

14 Tr. note: See note 9 in Chapter 58 for the full references.

> in Chapter 2 we have the word *ying* 盈 [fill, full] in "above and below *ying* 盈 [fill, full] each other" which is related to *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape], and the two characters rhyme. Thus, according to Fu Yi's version, *jiao* 较 [compare, relative, quite] should be changed to *xing* 形 [shape, form, to shape].

Chapter 15: "Worn-out not renewed (蔽不新成)" should be changed to "worn-out can be renewed (蔽而新成)."

In this sentence all of the ancient versions have "not". However, if we follow the argument of the text, "not" gives the opposite meaning and the text makes no sense. So "not (不)" should be changed to "can be (而)". The two characters look similar in seal script, and therefore might have been miscopied.

Chapter 16: "Commonality leads to kingliness, kingliness leads to heavenliness (公乃王，王乃天)" should be "commonality leads to *quan* 全 [complete, completeness], what is complete is *tian* 天 [Heaven, heaven, heavenly, sky] (公乃全，全乃天)."

The character *quan* 全 [complete, completeness] has been corrupted to read *wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] [in the received Wang Bi's version of the *Laozi*]. Wang Bi comments: "Because there is nothing one does not embrace perfectly"[15]—a comment on the meaning of *quan* 全 [complete, completeness]. Also, *quan* 全 [complete, completeness] and *tian* 天 [Heaven, heaven, heavenly, sky] rhyme, so the text should read *quan* 全 [complete, completeness] not *wang* 王 [king].

Chapter 18:[16] "Intelligence and wisdom emerge (慧智出)" should be "wisdom and intelligence emerge (智慧出)."

In his comment on this passage, Wang Bi writes: "Because 'wisdom and intelligence' emerges, then great falsity comes into being." From this comment, we can see that in the original Wang Bi version there must have been "wisdom and intelligence" which was reversed in copying. According to Wang Bi's commentary and the Fu Yi version, this is corrected.

Chapter 20: "I alone am stupid resembling (似) *bi* 鄙 [rustic, vulgar]" should be "I alone am stupid *qie* 且 [moreover, and, also] *bi* 鄙 [rustic, vulgar]."

The Fu Yi version has "*qie* 且 [moreover, and, also]" instead of "resembling (似)". "*Qie* 且 [moreover, and, also]" looks like "*yi* 目 [with, for, according to, use]" (which is *yi* 以 in ancient Chinese), and they were mistaken for each other. In ancient Chinese "*yi* 以 [with, for, according to, use]" and "resembling (似)" were interchangeable. So we should change the text according to Fu Yi's version.

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15 Ibid., 78.

16 Tr. note: Chen Guying's own version differs and does not include this line at all. See Chapter 18.

Chapter 23: "[A person who] engages in the Dao, the Dao becomes identical to the Dao (从事于道者, 道者同于道)" should be modified to read "[a person who] engages in the Dao (从事于道者), becomes identical to the Dao (同于道) (从事于道者, 同于道)."

The word "the Dao (道者[17])" in the second part is superfluous. In the *Dao ying* 道应 [*Responding to the Dao*] chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*], Laozi is quoted as saying "[a person who] engages in the Dao becomes identical to the Dao (从事于道者, 同于道)," which can corroborate the fact that the words "the Dao (道者)" do not occur twice in ancient editions of the text.

Chapter 25: "Therefore the Dao is great, heaven is great, the earth is great, and the king (王) is also great. Within the domain, there are four greats, and the king (王) occupies one place among them (故道大，天大，地大，王亦大。域中有四大，而王居其一焉。)." The character *wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] should be changed to *ren* 人 [people, human beings].

Fu Yi's version has "human beings (人) are also great" instead of "the king (王) is also great". The ancient form of the character *ren* 人 was written as *san* 三, which probably misled readers to take it as the character *wang* 王. However, the next line in this chapter reads, "human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao", which proves that the four greats refer to the Dao, heaven, earth, and human being. Therefore, the character *wang* 王 should be replaced by *ren* 人.

Chapter 26: "In lightness then the *ben* 本 [root, origin] is lost, in rashness sovereignty is forfeited (轻则失本，躁则失君)" should have the word "*gen* 根 [root, foundation]" replace "*ben* 本 [root, origin]."

The *Yongle dadian* 永乐大典 [*Yongle Encyclopedia*] reads, "in lightness the root (根) is lost" to have the line reflect the very first of the chapter: "*Zhong* 重 [heavy, heaviness, something that weights on one, weighty, grave, to attach importance to] is the root (根) for *qing* 轻 [light/the light, lightness, frivolous/the frivolous], stillness is the ruler of rashness."

Chapter 28: "Know the white, preserve the black, be a model unto the world. By being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err and you will return to the utmost of *wu* 無 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]. Know the *rong* 荣 [glory, honor] preserve the *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor, smeared, dirty], and be the valley of the world (知其白，守其黑，为天下式。为天下式，常德不忒，复归於无极。知其荣守其辱，为天下谷)." The text should read: "Know the white, preserve the *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor, smeared, dirty], and be the valley of the world (知其白, 守其辱，为天下谷。)."

In the *Tianxia* 天下 [*The World Under Heaven*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], the *Laozi* is quoted as saying: "Knowing the male while

17 Tr. note: 者 basically makes the Dao an object. From the perspective of translation it is difficult to parse the distinction here.

preserving the female, be the pathway of the world. Know the white, preserve *ru* 辱, be the valley of the world." This is the original text of the *Laozi*. Here we see that the 'male' is contrasted with the 'female' and 'the white' with '*ru* 辱.' The latter means 'black' here. In the annotations to the chapter *Shi hunli* 士昏礼 [*Marriage Rites of the Scholar-Officials*] of the *Yili* 仪礼 [*Book of Rites*], there is the following phrase: "When what is white is placed in what is black, it is called *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor, smeared, dirty] (以白造缁曰辱)." (See note 3 to Chapter 28).[18]

Chapter 29: "Some *cuo* 挫 [break, defeat, humiliate] some *hui* 隳 [destroy, wreck] (或挫或隳)" should be corrected to "some are *zai* 载 [carry, and, also] some *hui* 隳 [destroy, wreck] (或载或隳)."[19]

Heshang Gong notes: "*Zai* 载 [carry, and, also] means to be at peace, *hui* 隳 [destroy, wreck] means to be in danger." "*Zai* 载" (meaning peace) and "*hui* 隳" (meaning danger) are opposites, and so they continue the pattern of the previous sentence: "Some are strong while others are weak." It follows that the word "*cuo* 挫 [break, defeat, humiliate]" should be changed to "*zai* 载 [carry, and, also]" according to Heshang Gong's version.

Chapter 34: "All things rely on it [the great Dao] *er* 而 [and, however, thereby, thus] generate, and it [the great Dao] does not *ci* 辞 [speak, decline] (万物恃之而生而不辞)" should be "all things rely on it [the great Dao] *yi* 以 [so as to, in order to] generate, and it [the great Dao] does not *ci* 辞 [speak, decline] (万物恃之以生而不辞)."

Fu Yi's version, along with many other ancient versions, has "*yi* 以 [so as to, in order to]" instead of "*er* 而 [and, however, thereby, thus]," so it is changed here accordingly.

Chapter 34: "[The great Dao] achieves without claiming possession [of the achieved] (成功不名有)" should be "achieves without possessing (成果而不有)."

The *Laozi* often writes "without possessing (不有)" (see chapters 2, 10, 51); the word "to claim (名)" is superfluous here.

Chapter 39: "If the earth cannot be tranquil, it will inevitably *fa* 发 [issue, send forth, advance] (地无以宁，将恐发)." Here "*fa* 发 [issue, send forth, advance]" should be "*fei* 废 [abandon, waste]."

"*Fa* 发 [issue, send forth, advance]" is a textual corruption of the character "*fei* 废 [abandon, waste]" when it lost the "广" radical. According to Yan Lingfeng's 严灵峰 (d. 1999) account, the text should be changed to have "*fei* 废 [abandon, waste]." (See note 6 to Chapter 39)

18 Tr. note: This section is modified based on note 3 to Chapter 28 and Chen Guying's own suggestions.

19 Tr. note: Chen has another version that is slightly different, see Chapter 29.

Chapter 39: "If lords and princes did not have this means to achieve loftiness and nobility, they would, we fear, collapse[20] (侯王无以贵高将恐蹶)"[21] here "loftiness and nobility (贵高)" should be "*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure]."

The original version had "*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure]" but was [firstly] mistakenly changed into "noble (贵)". Later, people thought the next part of the text, ("Thus, the noble takes the base as its root, the higher takes the lower as its foundation [故贵以贱为本，高以下为基]"), was a response to the themes of the previous line, so then they added "loftiness (高)," placing it next to "noble (贵)." Zhao Zhijian's 赵至坚 (ca. 8th century) version has "*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure]," so the text should read, "if lords and princes did not have this means to achieve purity, they would, we fear, collapse (侯王无以贞将恐蹶)." The previous line, "if all things cannot grow, they will inevitably be extinguished (万物无以生，将恐灭)," has the character "*sheng* 生 [generate, live, exist, grow]" which rhymes with "*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure]."

Chapter 39: "Ultimate number of *yu* 舆 [chariot, carriage, multiple] amounts to no *yu* 舆 [chariot, carriage, multiple][22] (致数舆无舆);"[23] here the line should be "utmost acclaim lacks acclaim (致誉无誉)."

The word "number (数)" is superfluous. "*Yu* 舆 [chariot, carriage, multiple, popular, public]" was originally "acclaim (誉[24])." In the [*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 [*Textual Explanations of the Classics*], Lu Deming 陆德明 (d. 630) comments on the word "acclaim," "praise or blame" [i.e. it means "praise" as in "praise or blame" (毁誉)]. Because the [*Jingdian*] *shiwen* [经典] 释文 [*Textual Explanations of the Classics*] is based on Wang Bi's version, [it is fair to infer that the basic version of Wang Bi's version originally had "*yu* 誉 [acclaim, fame, reputation]". The incorrect use of *yu* 舆 [chariot, carriage, multiple, popular, public]' was due to later mis-transcription

Chapter 45: "Rashness conquers cold, tranquility conquers heat (躁胜寒, 静胜热)"[25] should be "tranquility conquers rashness, cold conquers heat (静胜躁, 寒胜热)."

Here, as in Chapter 26, as well as in Chapters 60, 61, and 72 of Wang Bi's commentary "tranquility" and "rashness" are opposites. Therefore, "rashness conquers cold" not only seems unfitting [in terms of making sense], but is also incompatible with Laozi's thought. Reading it as "tranquility conquers rashness, cold conquers heat (静胜躁, 寒胜热)" instead resonates with Laozi's thinking. These two phrases [静胜躁, 寒胜热] are an analogy for pure and tranquil non-action (无为) overcoming disturbing, chaotic, and overly conscious action (有为), and are in line with the next part of the text, namely "tranquil and calm, to align all under heaven (清静为天下正)."

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20 Ibid., 128.

21 Tr. note: Chen has another version that is slightly different, Chapter 39.

22 Ibid., 128; translation modified.

23 Tr. note: Chen's version is different. See Chapter 39.

24 Tr. note: This character is written in classical Chinese as "譽."

25 Tr. note: Chen's version is different. See Chapter 45.

Chapter 47: "Do not see and yet are *ming* 名 [names (things), name, reputation, famous] (不见而名)" should be "do not see and yet are *ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever] (不见而明)."

In the *Laozi* "see (见)" and "*ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever]" are often linked (see Chapters 21 and 52). "Do not see and yet are *ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever] (不见而明)" means not seeing but still being clear about the Dao of Heaven (天道). We should go by Zhang Sicheng's 张嗣成 (d. 1344) version here and read "*ming* 明 [bright, brighten, enlighten, perspicacious, obvious, revealing, smart, clever]" instead of "*ming* 名 [names (things), name, reputation, famous]."

Chapter 62: "Going by what is sought to obtain (以求得)" should be "what is sought can be obtained (求以得)."

The Jing Long stele version, Fu Yi's edition, and numerous other ancient manuscripts record "*qiu yi* 求以" instead of "*yi qiu* 以求." In this way "what is sought can be obtained (求以得)" forms a symmetrical couple with the line that follows: "Felons can expiate their crimes (有罪以免)." The text should be corrected according to the Jing Long stele version.

Chapter 66: To "therefore wishes to above the people (是以欲上民)" the word *shengren* 圣人 [the sage] should be added: "if the *shengren* 圣人 [the sage] wishes to above the people (是以圣人欲上民)."

Other ancient versions have the word *shengren* 圣人 [the sage], only the received Wang version lacks these characters. A later line reads, "the sage stays above and the people do not feel the *zhong* 重 [heavy, heaviness, something that weights on one, weighty, grave, to attach importance to] (是以圣人处上而民不重)," which proves that there was the word *shengren* 圣人 [the sage] in the context. Therefore, the word *shengren* 圣人 [the sage] should be added accordingly. Chiang Hsi-Chang (Jiang Xichang) 蒋锡昌 (d. 1974) writes: "The *editio princeps* of the *Dao zang* 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*] does record the two characters '*shengren* 圣人 [the sage]', we can thus amend [the text] accordingly."

Chapter 71: "It is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], that is because they *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried], [and is thereby] not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] (夫唯病病，是以不病，圣人不病，以其病病，是以不病)." This should read: "The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried), by *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. It is because of not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried) that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] (圣人不病，以其病病，夫唯不病，是以不病)."[26]

The lines here have been mixed up and are repetitive—all ancient versions attest to this error. This passage should be amended in accordance with the characteristic

26 Tr. note: Chen's version is different. See Chapter 71.

writing style of the *Laozi*, as well as the citation in the *Ji bing bu* 疾病部 [*The Category of Diseases*] chapter of the [*Taiping*] *Yu lan* [太平] 御览 [*Imperial Reader* (*of the Taiping Era*)]).[27]

Chapter 75: "The people take death lightly, because they go after richness in life. (民之轻死，以其求生之厚)." It should be corrected to read: "The people take death lightly, because their superiors go after richness in life (民之轻死，以其上求生之厚)."

The Fu Yi version has "superiors (上)" (which means rulers). Wang Bi comments: "In other words, the reasons for the common folk indulging in deviant behavior and the reasons for government ending in chaos always stem from the ruler and never stem from the subjects. The common folk model themselves after their ruler[28] (言民之所以僻, 治之所以乱, 皆由上不由其下也, 民从上也。)." From Wang's Bi's comments we can see that his version originally had "superiors (上)." Accordingly (taking Wang's comments and Fu Yi's version into account), we can add this character.

Chapter 76: "All things and grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp (万物草木之生也柔脆)" should be reduced into "grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp (草木之生也柔脆)."

The chapter reads, "human life is soft and weak, human death is stiff and firm. Grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp." "Humans" and "grasses and trees" are all part of all things, making the words "all things" superfluous. Fu Yi's version does not have "all things," so these words should be deleted accordingly.

Chapter 76: "Soldiers are strong then they will not be victorious, trees are strong then they are attacked (兵强则不胜，木强则兵。)" should be amended to read "soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut (兵强则灭，木强则折。)."

In the *Liezi* 列子 [*Writings of Master Lie*], *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*], and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*] we have "soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut," so the text should be changed accordingly.

Chapter 80: "Let *ren* 人 [people, human beings] return to the use of tying knots [instead of writing] (使民复结绳而用之)" should be "let *min* 民 [the people, the multitude, citizens] return to the use of tying knots [instead of writing] (使民复结绳而用之)."

"*Ren* 人 [people, human beings]" should be "*min* 民 [the people, the multitude, citizens]". Following the *Quqie* 胠箧 [*Pilfering Chests*] chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], the Heshang Gong version, and other ancient versions, the text is corrected [with the character "*min* 民 [the people, the multitude, citizens)"], to be more in line with the rest of the chapter.[29]

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27 Tr. note: See note 5 in Chapter 71.

28 Ibid., 183.

29 Tr. note: See note 4 in Chapter 80.

We have looked at corrections to the received Wang Bi version of the *Laozi*, and made some assessments of Wang Bi's commentary. Wang Bi's accomplishments are not only found in his commentary to the *Laozi*. If we isolate his commentary on the *Laozi*, we find that it is Wang Bi's unique [philosophical] system and constitutes an excellent philosophical work in its own right.

Heshang Gong, Laozi Daodejing zhu 老子道德经注 [Commentary on Laozi's Daodejing]

Exactly who Heshang Gong was, and when he wrote his commentary remain mysteries. The *Shen xian zhuan* 神仙传 [*Biographies of Deities and Immortals*] records: "During the rule of Emperor Wen of Han 汉文帝 (202–157 BCE), Heshang Gong lived in a grass hut by a river. One day, the emperor went to see him. Heshang Gong 'clapped his hands and lifted [his body] while sitting, slowly rising into the air, as high as a few *zhang* [丈, ancient Chinese unit of length, one *zhang* equals around 3 meters] above the ground,' and then gave the emperor two scrolls, saying, 'It has been a thousand and seven hundred years since I finished annotating this classic. [During this time,] I have passed it to three persons, now [it will be] four persons with you.' After saying this, he disappeared. This story was recorded by later religious Daoists."

The *Shi ji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] mentions a certain Heshang Zhangren (elderly person who lived by a river), and it can be argued that Heshang Gong's commentary is a work dating from the Han dynasty (两汉之际).[30] It uses terminology from experts in longevity, and its thematic titles for each chapter were added by later religious Daoists.

Among many ancient versions of the *Daodejing*, Wang Bi's and Heshang Gong's versions were the most widely circulated. Wang Bi's version is supported by most scholars, and Heshang Gong's has been the most commonly used among non-scholars. Given the popularity of Heshang Gong's version, it is important to look closely into its merits and flaws.

We can begin by looking at some of Heshang Gong's felicitous comments and explanations, which are often also very concise. For instance:

Chapter 3: "Do not promote talented [persons] (不尚贤)." Heshang Gong comments: "'Talented' here refers to those who are deemed by common customs to be talented … They discard (real) substance and fabricate appearances. 'Do not promote,'

30 Tr. note: "两汉之际" is a problematic phrase and scholars use it differently. It can mean (1) the period of the two Han dynasties, which takes 际 to mean 'the time of …', or (2) the transitional period between the two Han dynasties, which takes 际 to mean 'between'. Both meanings are widely used.

here, means 'do not honor them with high salaries or positions'.[31] (贤谓世俗之贤…去质为文也。不尚者，不贵之以禄，不贵之以官。)."

Chapter 3: "Makes the people not contend (不使民争)." Heshang Gong comments: "They will not fight for merit or reputation, but return to '*ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]' (不争功名，返自然也。)."

Chapter 5: "The heavens and earth are not humane (天地不仁)." Heshang Gong comments: "Heaven's implementations, the transformations of the earth—they do not go by humaneness or favor, they are all about (任) *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] (天施地化，不以仁恩，任自然也。)."

Chapter 20: "Abandon learning and be without *you* 忧 [worry, sorrow] (绝学无忧)." Heshang Gong comments: "Get rid of the ostentatious and showy, and then there will be no worries or grief (除浮华则无忧患也。)."

Chapter 20: "The multitudes all have enough to spare (众人皆有余)." Heshang Gong comments: "When the people have too much wealth, they pursue luxury, when they have too much knowledge, they use it for trickery (众人余财以为奢，余智以为诈。)."

Chapter 25: "The Dao models itself after *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously] (道法自然)." Heshang Gong comments: "The nature of the Dao is *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously]; there is nothing for it to model after [besides itself] (道性自然，无所法也。)."

Chapter 36: "The sharp instruments (利器) of a state (国之利器)." Heshang Gong comments: "'Sharp instruments (利器)' [refers to] the art of politics and power (利器，权道)."

The above quotes from Heshang Gong's commentary reveal its excellence in clarity and conciseness. In what follows we will be looking at instances of mistakes or distortions of the meaning of the *Laozi*. We will start with some mistakes.

Chapter 4: "The Dao is *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash, empty], but use it (道冲而用之)." Heshang Gong comments: "'*Chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash, empty],' means 'zhong 中 [within, center, half].' Dao hides its name and conceals its fame. Its use is found within (冲，中也。道匿名藏誉，其用在中。)."

"The Dao is *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash, empty]," describes that the "Dao" in terms of its shape or form is empty. "*Chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash, empty]" here should be "*zi/chong* 盅 [a small cup]" which is then interpreted to mean "empty (虚)." Heshang Gong's interpretation of *chong* 冲 [surging, swash, rush, clash, empty] as "within (中)" is unfitting. "Dao" in this chapter is not the Dao that "hides its name and conceals its fame" as Heshang Gong supposes. The Dao that "hides its name and conceals its fame" is already speaking of a Dao on the level of life [or everyday life], whereas the "Dao" being described here exists on a much higher metaphysical level.

31 Dan G. Reid, *The Ho-Shang Kung Commentary on Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching* (Revised edition), (Montreal: Center Ring Publishing, 2015), 116; translation modified.

Chapter 24: "Someone who possesses the Dao does not put themselves in this position (有道者不处)." Heshang Gong comments: "This is to say that the people who possess the Dao do not live in these states (言有道之人，不居其国也。)."

"Not in this position (不处)" does not mean "not live in these states". This should be read in line with the previous parts of the chapter, where "not in this position" refers to not making oneself appear, not considering oneself as right, not being conceited, and not boasting about oneself".

Chapter 27: "The sage always excels at helping others (圣人常善救人)." Heshang Gong comments: "Sages always teach people loyalty and filial piety, hoping to rescue people's pure nature and destiny (聖人所以常教人忠孝者，欲以救人性命。)."[32]

Heshang Gong adopts a Confucian perspective here, whereas Laozi teaches people to conduct themselves in accordance with *ziran* 自然 [self-so, nature, naturally, spontaneously], instead of "teaching people loyalty and filial piety." Chapters 18 and 19 make it very clear that Heshang Gong's commentary and the *Laozi* itself are not compatible here.

Chapter 30: "Such affairs are bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back] (其事好还)." Heshang Gong comments: "If he accepts responsibility for harmonizing himself, he will not be hated by others[33] (其举事好还自责，不怨於人也。)."

"Such affairs are bound to *huan* 还 [to return, come back] (其事好还。)" refers to the use of military leads to reap the fruit of one's own action, namely, the consequence will be unfortunate retaliation.

Chapter 32: "The Dao is constantly nameless (道常无名)." Heshang Gong comments: "The Dao can be *yin*, can be *yang*, can be loose, can be tense, can survive, can perish. Therefore, it is nameless (道常无名，道能阴能阳，能弛能张，能存能亡，故无常名也。)."

The sentence here should be parsed as follows: "the Dao is constantly nameless, the uncarved block (道常无名, 朴)." In Chapter 37 we have the phrase "the nameless simple (朴) (无名之朴)," [which shows that] "*pu* 朴 [simple, plain, unadorned, uncarved wood]" is an analogy for "nameless (无名)." The Dao is without form or shape, and thereby cannot be named. Heshang Gong's comment is unrelated to the original text. Since the Dao exists eternally, to say it "can survive, can perish" is certainly not fitting.

Chapter 32: "*Zhi* 制 [manufacture, process] begins, there are names (始制有名)." Heshang Gong comments: "The beginning refers to the Dao. 'There are names' refers to the myriad things. The Dao is nameless, yet can dominate what has names. The Dao is formless, yet can dominate what has forms[34] (始，道也。有名，万物也。道无名能制於有名，无形，能制於有形也。)."

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32 Ibid., 219; translation modified.

33 Ibid., 231; translation modified.

34 Ibid., 243; translation modified.

"*Zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, here] begins, there are names (始制有名)" expresses a similar meaning with "when uncarved wood is split, it is made into *qi* 器 [utensil, instrument] (朴散为器)" in Chapter 28. *Zhi* 制 [manufacture, process, here] is used in the sense of "to produce/production" (see Lin Xiyi's commentary: "*Zhi* 制 means *zuo* 作 [initiate, arise, produce]"). Heshang Gong renders it as "dominating, controlling", which is not fitting.

Chapter 32: "Heaven also knows to stop (天亦将知止)." Heshang Gong comments: "People can align with the Dao and act in accordance with virtue. In this way, they will know heaven in themselves[35] (人能去道行德，天亦将自知之。)."

In Heshang Gong's version, the character "heaven (天)" is a wrong transcription of "even (夫)" and consequently, the commentary perpetuates the mistake. We should correct it according to Wang Bi's version to read "there will also be the knowledge of [when and where to] stop (夫亦将知止)."

Chapter 33: "One who dies but is not dead has longevity (死而不亡者寿。)." Heshang Gong comments: "When the eyes do not observe frantically, the ears do not listen frantically, and the mouth does not speak frantically, there will be no blame or hatred of the world. Thus, lifespans will be long[36] (目不妄视，耳不妄听，口不妄言，则无怨恶於天下，故长寿。)."

"One who dies but is not dead" is an analogy for the preservation of the Dao. Like with many thinkers in history, whose bodies have perished, but their ideas and spirits remain alive; this is what is meant here by "longevity."

Chapter 39: "Utmost acclaim lacks acclaim (致誉无誉)." Heshang Gong's version has "If one approaches a number of carriages, there is no carriage (致数车无车)." This passage is erroneous, therefore, his commentary is also irrelevant.

Chapter 50: "Of ten there are three (十有三)." Heshang Gong comments: "Thirteen means nine cavities and four joints."

"Of ten there are three (十有三)" indicates three parts out of ten. Heshang Gong's interpretation relies on Han Fei's understanding—"four limbs and nine cavities"—and is thus mistaken.

Chapter 55: "To add to life is called *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen]." Heshang Gong comments: "*xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] means long(evity) (长) (祥, 长也。)."

Here "*xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen]" should be understood as a bad omen—it also means disaster. This sense of the word *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] was commonly used by the ancients. Wang Bi's interpretation here is correct. Unlike Heshang Gong, he understands *xiang* 祥 [auspicious, omen] as *yao* 夭 [premature death] (which is used here as *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy]).

35 Ibid., 243; translation modified.
36 Ibid., 247.

Chapter 57: "Govern the state with *zheng* 正 [straight, correct, to rectify], employ military means with *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, rare, wonderful], (以正治国，以奇用兵)." Heshang Gong comments: "Heaven commands the upright person, commands him to have [to be in charge of] a state. Heaven allows the cunning person, allows him [to be in charge of] employing military. (天使正身之人，使有国也…天使诈伪之人，使用兵也。)."

Whereas these lines deal purely with human affairs, Heshang Gong uses "Heaven 'commands'" in his interpretation, which is completely incompatible with the *Laozi*.

Chapter 58: "What is regular (正) becomes *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, unusual, irregular], what is good becomes *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy]. (正复为奇，善复为妖。)." Heshang Gong comments: "When the ruler is not properly aligned (正), those below, even though upright, are changed by the dishonesty of those above them. Good people are all changed by the strange and bad (妖) ways of those above them[37] (人君不正，下虽正，复化上为诈也。善人皆复化上为妖祥也。)."

Things are constantly happening in the world, and there is little regularity. What is regular (正) can suddenly become *qi/ji* 奇 [strange, unusual, irregular], what is good can suddenly become *yao* 妖 [evil, demonic, ominous, deviancy]. Here Laozi is describing how things cycle and revolve. Heshang Gong's commentary does not accurately fit with Laozi's original meaning.

Chapter 58: "They are *lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] without *gui* 劌 [to cut, injure] (廉而不刿)." Heshang Gong comments: "Sages are honest and pure … (圣人廉清)."

Here *lian* 廉 [clean, upright, sharp] means something sharp. Wang Bi wrongly takes this to mean honest and pure (清廉) and so does Heshang Gong.

Chapter 72: "Without *xia* 狭 [narrow, tight] where they live (无狭其所居)." Heshang Gong comments: "This means that for the heart-mind to house the spirit, it is important to be broad and flexible, not urgent and tight[38] (谓心居神，当宽柔，不当急狭也。)."

Here Laozi wants to warn rulers not to force the people to be unable to live settled lives.

In what precedes, we noted mistakes and misinterpretations in Heshang Gong's commentary. Because he views and comments on the *Laozi* through the lens of Daoist religion, there are quite a few strange and absurd comments, as we will see below.

Chapter 1: "The darkness of darkness (玄之又玄)." Heshang Gong comments: "Darkness refers to Heaven. This is to say that people who have desires, and people who have no desires, both receive *qi* from Heaven[39] (玄，天也。言有欲之人与无欲之人，同受气於天也。)."

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37 Ibid., 347–348; translation modified.

38 Ibid., 401.

39 Ibid., 110; translation modified.

"Darkness (玄)" means deep and distant. Heshang Gong uses "Heaven" to explain "shimmering darkness (玄)" and contends that people receive *qi* from Heaven, which is completely unrelated to Laozi's original meaning.

Chapter 6: "*Gu* 谷 [valley] *shen* 神 [spirit, god] [does/can] not die"

"A valley is nourishing. One who has the power to nourish the spirit will not die. 'Spirit' refers to the five organ spirits. The liver hides the ethereal (魂) spirit; the lungs hide the corporeal (魄) spirit; the heart-mind hides the spirit (神) spirit; the kidneys and sexual organs hide the essence (精) spirit; and the spleen hides the will (志) spirit.[40] (谷，养也。人能养神则不死也。神，谓五脏之神也。肝藏魂，肺藏魄，心藏神，肾藏精，脾藏志。)."

Here the theory of the Daoist alchemists regarding "nourishing spirit" is forced into the interpretation. The entire commentary to Chapter 6 is strange, absurd, and unreasonable.

Chapter 13: "If I did not have a body, what worries would I have? (及吾无身，吾有何患？)." Heshang Gong comments: "If I did not have a body, I could obtain the natural spontaneity (自然) of the Dao; I could be light enough to ascend peacefully into the clouds; I could leave and enter without there being any opening; I could spiritually be connected with the Dao.[41] (及吾无身，吾何有患。使吾无有身体，得道自然，轻举昇云，出入无间，与道通神。)."

Heshang Gong holds that "if I did not have a body" means that one could "ascend peacefully into the clouds," a claim that sounds mythological.

Chapter 46: "*Que* 却 [retreat, return] the riding horses (走马) go to *fen* 粪 [apply manure, clean up] (却走马以粪)." Heshang Gong comments: "Soldiers are not employed, and people go back to leading their horses on foot while managing and farming their fields. Those who cultivate the body lead yang essence to fertilize the body[42] (兵甲不用，却走马治农田，治身者却阳精以糜其身。)."

The first sentence in the commentary already explains the line from the *Laozi* very clearly, but in the second part Heshang Gong goes too far. Terms like "yang essence" were popular among alchemists.

Chapter 54: "By cultivating it in oneself, its virtuosity (德) becomes genuine (修之於身，其德乃真。)." Heshang comments: "Cultivate the Dao in the body by cherishing the *qi* and nurturing the spirit. This will benefit you by prolonging the aging process[43] (修道於身爱气养神，益寿延年。)."

This is using rules for [Daoist religious practices concerning] nourishing life, or extending life, to comment on the *Laozi*.

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40 Ibid., 127; translation modified.
41 Ibid., 165; translation modified.
42 Ibid., 299; translation modified.
43 Ibid., 327; translation modified.

Chapter 55: "Containing thick *de* 德 [virtue, virtuosity, efficacy, potency, power] [can be] compared to an infant (含德之厚，比于赤子。)." Heshang Gong comments: "Gods protect virtuous (德) people as a father and mother protect their infant[44] (神明保佑含德之人，若父母之於赤子也。)."

"Gods/spirits protect" is a phrase used by religious Daoists and bears no relation to the *Laozi*.

Chapter 59: "Deep roots and firm foundations (深根固柢)." Heshang Gong comments: "People can use *qi* to work the root, and use vital essence to work the stalk. Similarly, if a tree's roots are not deep, it will be uprooted, and a stalk that is not firm will fall. This suggests deepening and accumulating *qi*, while strengthening vital essence. Then there will be no leaking or flowing out[45] (人能以氣為根，以精為蒂，如樹根不深則拔，蒂不堅則落。言當深藏其氣，固守其精，使無漏泄。)."

Heshang Gong uses alchemical terms such as "accumulating *qi*" and "strengthening vital essence", which have nothing to do with the original meaning of the *Laozi*.

In addition to the commentaries mentioned above, Heshang Gong's commentaries to chapters 60, 71, and 72 present him viewing the *Laozi* from the perspective of extending life. From what is given above we can see that his commentary is heavily influenced by alchemical thought. Wang Li once remarked that "Heshang Gong's commentary brims with the language of the masters in extending life, but the *Laozi* is never about nourishing life, so the commentary is fundamentally incorrect."

In the next part we will look at places where Heshang Gong's version misses characters or contains incorrect ones.

Heshang Gong's Chapter 3 reads: "Makes the heart-minds not disorderly (使心不乱)." The two previous sentences in this chapter contain the word "people (民)." In this third sentence we should follow the pattern of the first two and have the word "people (民)" as well ("Makes the heart-minds of the people not disorderly (使民心不乱).")

Heshang Gong's Chapter 4 reads: "Abysmal! *Si* 似 [seemingly, as though] the ancestor of the ten thousand things (渊乎，似万物之宗。)." This is followed by: "So deep! As though something out there (湛兮似或存。)" According to Wang Bi's version, "abysmal (渊乎)" should be changed to "so abysmal (渊兮)," which is symmetrical with "so deep (湛兮)."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 10 reads: "When the heavenly gate opens and closes, are you not as *ci* 雌 [female]? (天门开阖，能无雌乎？)." "Not as *ci* 雌 [female]? (能无雌乎？)" should be changed to "able to act as *ci* 雌 [female] (能为雌乎？)". Similarly, in the line above this one, "by loving the people and governing the state, can you engage in not knowing (爱民治国，能无知乎。)," "not knowing (无知)" should be changed to "non-action (无为)."

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44 Ibid., 331; translation modified.

45 Ibid., 353–354; translation modified.

Additionally, every sentence is this chapter may end with "*hu* 乎 [at, because, sentence-final interrogative particle]", as we find it in Wang Bi's version. (See Chapter 10 for details.)

Heshang Gong's Chapter 15 reads: "Worn-out can not be renewed (蔽不新成。)." It should be "worn-out can be renewed (蔽而新成)." Here *bu* 不 [not] is a corruption of *er* 而 [and, however, thereby, thus].

Heshang Gong's Chapter 16 reads: "If one does not know constancy, one acts *wei* 萎 [withered, spiritless], which leads to misfortune (不知常，妄作凶。)." *Wei* 萎 [withered, spiritless] should be changed to "recklessly (妄)." Even Heshang Gong's commentary has "recklessly (妄);" it is a simple "misspelling" in the text.

Heshang Gong's Chapter 23 reads: "[A person who] engages in the Dao, the Dao becomes identical to the Dao (从事于道者, 道者同于道)" should be modified to read "[a person who] engages in the Dao (从事于道者), becomes identical to the Dao (同于道) (从事于道者, 同于道)." The word "the Dao (道者)" in the second part is a superfluous repetition that should be deleted.

Heshang Gong's Chapter 25 reads: "Therefore the Dao is great, Heaven is great, the earth is great, and the king (王) is also great. Within the domain, there are four greats, and the king (王) occupies one place among them (故道大, 天大, 地大, 王亦大. 域中有四大, 而王居其一焉)." The character *wang* 王 [the king, supreme, to rule] should be a misspelling of *ren* 人 [people, human beings]. The ancient form of the character *ren* 人 was written as *san* 三, which probably misled the readers taking it for *wang* 王. However, the next line in this chapter reads, "human beings follow the example of the earth, the earth follows the example of heaven, heaven follows the example of the Dao," where there is *ren* 人 instead of *wang* 王.

Heshang Gong's Chapter 26 reads: "Lightness then minister is lost (轻则失臣)." It should be changed to "lightness then *ben* 本 [root, origin] is lost (轻则失本)." The chapter starts with: "*Zhong* 重 [heavy/the heavy/heaviness, weighty/the weighty] is the root (根) for *qing* 轻 [light/the light/lightness, frivolous/the frivolous], stillness is the ruler of rashness." So it should have "lightness then *ben* 本 [root, origin] is lost, in rashness sovereignty is forfeited (轻则失本，躁则失君)" to complete it.

Heshang Gong's Chapter 28 reads: "Know the white, preserve the black, be a model unto the world. By being a model unto the world, constant efficacy will not err and you will return to the utmost of *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being]. Know the *rong* 荣 [glory, honor] preserve the *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor], and be the valley of the world. (知其白，守其黑，为天下式。为天下式，常德不忒，复归於无极。知其荣, 守其辱，为天下谷。)."

According to the "Tian Xia 天下 [*The World Under Heaven*]" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], the above passage should be reduced to: "Know the white, preserve the *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor], and be the valley of the world. 知其白，守其辱，为天下谷。)."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 32 reads: "The heavens also know of [when and where to] *zhi* 止 [stop, only, until] (天亦将知止)." It should be changed according to the Wang Bi version to "there will also be the knowledge of [when and where to] *zhi* 止 [stop, only, until] (夫亦将知止)." Here *fu* 夫 [husband, man; generic personal/demonstrative pronoun] was miswritten as *tian* 天 [the heavens].

Heshang Gong's Chapter 34 reads: "All things rely on it so as to generate, and the Dao does not speak and achieves without naming what it possesses (万物恃之而生而不辞，功成不名有)." It should be changed to: "All things rely on it so as to generate, and the Dao does not speak and achieves without possessing (万物恃之而生而不辞，功成不有)." (See the comment on Wang Bi's Chapter 34 above.)

Heshang Gong's Chapter 36 reads: "If makes it weakened, must strengthen it (将使弱之)" should be "if [one] wants to weaken it, they must strengthen it (将欲弱之)." According to the pattern of the previous and following sentences in this context, the "*shi* 使 [make, apply, use]" should be replaced with "*yu* 欲 [want, desire]."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 39 reads: "If the lords and kings cannot be lofty and noble, they will inevitably be overthrown … the orphaned, the widowed, and he who is without possessions (不谷) … the utmost number of *che* 车 [vehicle] lacks *che* 车 [vehicle]. (侯王无以贞将恐蹶 … 孤, 寡, 不谷 … 致数车无车.)." It should be: "If the lords and kings cannot be *zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure], they will inevitably be overthrown … the orphaned, the widowed, and he who is without possessions … utmost acclaim lacks acclaim (侯王无以贵高将恐蹶 … 孤, 寡, 不谷 … 故致数誉无誉。)." "Grand and lofty (贵高)" should be "*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure]." (Originally "*zhen* 贞 [honest, upright, pure]" was mistaken for "noble (贵)," and later "lofty (高)" was mistakenly added.) "*Gu* 毂 [hub, wheel]" and "*gu* 谷 [valley, river]" were interchangeable in classical Chinese, so Heshang Gong's commentary mistakes "*gu* 毂 [hub, wheel]" for "*gu* 毂 [hub, wheel]" of a vehicle (车). In Wang Bi's version, "*yu* 誉 [acclaim, fame, reputation]" is mistaken for "*yu* 舆 [chariot, carriage, multiple, popular, public]" and Heshang Gong took the mistake even further by [replacing] "*yu* 舆 [popular, public]" with "*che* 车 [vehicle]."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 47 reads: "Without seeing, naming (不见而名)," "*ming* 名 [naming]" should be changed to "*ming* 明 [bright, clear]."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 62 reads: "Fine words can be traded, honorable deeds can improve common people (美言可以市，尊行可以加人。)." It should be corrected to read: "Fine words can be used to purchase respect, fine deeds can be used to improve people (美言可以市尊，美行可以加人)."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 62 reads: "Going by what is sought to obtain (以求得)." It should be "what is sought can be obtained (求以得)." (See the comment on Wang Bi's Chapter 62 above.)

Heshang Gong's Chapter 71 reads: "It is because of *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]; that is because they *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill]

bing 病 [sick, defect, worried], [and is thereby] not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] (夫唯不病，是以不病，圣人不病，以其病病，是以不病)." This should read: "The sage is not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried), by *bing* 病 [vex, worry, fall ill] *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried]. It is because of not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried) that [one] can be not *bing* 病 [sick, defect, worried] (圣人不病，以其病病，夫唯不病，是以不病)."

Heshang Gong's Chapter 75 reads: "Because they go after richness in life (以其求生之厚)." It should be "because their superiors go after richness in life (以其上求生之厚)." The two sentences precedent to this quoted line have "because their superiors (以其上)," but this line is missing "superiors (上)" and it should be added.

Heshang Gong's Chapter 76 reads: "All things and grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp.... Soldiers are strong then they will not be victorious, trees are strong then *gong* 共 (share, total, common) (万物草木之生也柔脆。。。兵强则不胜，木强则共。)." This should be: "Grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp.... Soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut (草木之生也柔脆。。。兵强则灭，木强则折。)." The phrase 'all things' is superfluous." The second part (soldiers are strong then extermination [follows], trees are strong then cut) is corrected according to the *Liezi* and *Huainanzi*. (See the comment on Wang Bi's Chapter 76 above [for a detailed account, see note 8 of Chapter 76].)

Above are evaluations of the most widespread versions of the *Laozi*, namely Wang Bi's and Heshang Gong's. In terms of commentary, we can say with certainty that Wang Bi's is superior to Heshang Gong's. In terms of their versions of the *Laozi*, both have merits and flaws. Generally speaking, scholars still use Wang Bi's version. However, today's received Wang Bi's version is not the original one and it has been the source of not a few [new] errors due to mis-transcription and missing characters.

Other Commentators

Yan Zun 严遵 (*d. 41*), Laozi zhu 老子注 [Laozi Commentary]

Yan Zun's *Laozi zhu* 老子注 [*Laozi Commentary*] was lost a long time ago. Based on Chen Jingyuan's 陈景元 (d. 1094) *Daode zhenjing cangshi zuan wei pian* 道德真经藏室纂微篇 [*Compiling the Subtlety of a Private Collection of the Genuine Daodejing*], Li Lin's 李霖 (ca. 12th century) *Daode zhenjing qushan ji* 道德真经取善集 [*Collection of the Quality Commentaries on the Genuine Daodejing*], Liu Weiyong's 刘惟永 (ca. 13th century) *Daode zhenjing jiyi* 道德真经集义 道德真经取善集 [*Collection of the Quality Commentaries on the Genuine Daodejing*], and Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 (13th century; dates unknown) *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德经古本集注 [*Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text*], and other books that incorporate Yan Zun's commentary, Yan Lingfeng has recovered (a version of) Yan Zun's *Laozi zhu* 老子注 [*Laozi Commentary*].

Yan Zun's commentary is divided into seventy-two chapters, and the reason is that: "The first part of the classic goes with heaven (天), the second part goes with the earth (地), the *yin* (阴) Dao has eight parts, the yang (阳) Dao has nine parts. Using *yin* to go by *yang*, there are thus seventy-two sections; using yang to go by yin, there are the first and second parts. Taking five and going by eight, the first part restarts after the 40th [chapter], taking four and going by eight, the second part ends with the 32nd [chapter]."

Much of the language in Yan Zun's commentary is erroneous and/or absurd. For example:

"The spiritual and bright attains its proper position, connected with the empty and non-present. The souls rest, and each gets its own settledness (安). The will is tranquil and the *qi* 气 [energy, vital energy, material] passes seamlessly, the heart beats and blood circulation are harmonious and steady." (This is commentary to Chapter 16: "Returning to the root is called tranquility, tranquility is called (曰) returning to *ming* 命 [life, destiny, mandate].")

"When there is not enough credibility it is called self-determining, not trusting is called the heavenly person (天人)." (This is commentary to Chapter 17: "When there is no credibility, there will be no trust.")

"Heaven and earth are generated from great harmony (太和), great harmony is generated from empty darkness." (This is commentary to Chapter 40: "All the things in the world are generated from *you* 有 [presence, having, being], *you* 有 [presence, having, being] is generated from *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being].")

From Yan Zun's *Laozi zhu* 老子注 [*Laozi Commentary*] we can get a glimpse of Han Dynasty *Laozi* studies.

Gu Shenzi 谷神子 (*Dates Unknown*), Daode zhigui lunzhu 道德指归论注 [Annotation of the On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De]

Gu Shenzi recorded and edited Yan Zun's *Daode zhigui lun* 道德指归论 [*On the Essential Ideas of Dao and De*], while he also wrote some commentary to the *Laozi* itself.

Wang Bi, Laozi wei zhi lie lüe 老子微旨列略 [A Brief Treatise on the Subtle Meaning of the Laozi]

Lie lüe [*A Brief Treatise*] was compiled by Yan Lingfeng on the basis of the selected text from the *Dao zang* 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*] and published in the form of photocopy.

The *Laozi wei zhi lie lüe* 老子微旨列略 [*A Briefing on the Subtle Meaning of the Laozi*] describes how Laozi's Dao is without form and without name, subtle, dark, profound, and fine, and it expands on the idea of "cherishing the root and setting aside the branches;" observing the simple and plain, and casting off trickery and profit. While explaining the *Laozi*, this text also reveals a line of thought connecting it with Wang Bi's commentary.

2 Early Tang to the Five Dynasties

Fu Yi (*d. 639*), Daodejing guben pian 道德经古本篇 [The Ancient Text of the Daodejing]

Fu Yi's version is extremely important for those in collation studies. It is a development on Wang Bi's version. It often contains added final particles such as "*yi* 矣" and "*ye* 也" and has quite a few mistaken characters. However, there are many passages on the basis of which the mistakes in Wang Bi's version can be rectified. For example:

Chapter 25: Fu Yi's version reads, "forced to name it [I] call it the Dao". Whereas Wang Bi's and many other versions do not include the word "*qiang* 强 [force, strong, violent]," it should be added here, since it is found in Fu Yi's version. Similarly, also in Chapter 25, Fu Yi's version reads, "the Dao is great, heaven is great, the earth is great, humans are also great," Wang Bi's as well as many other ancient versions have "the king (王) is also great," but it should be corrected according to Fu Yi's version to read "humans beings (人) are also great."

Chapter 39: Fu Yi's version reads, "ultimate number of acclaim (誉) [amounts to] no acclaim (誉)." Here "number" is superfluous. The word "acclaim (誉)" should be in accordance with the original *Laozi*. Wang Bi's version has "chariots (舆)," whereas Heshang Gong's has "*che* 车 [vehicle]." All the ancient editions should be corrected following Fu Yi's version.

Chapter 62: Fu Yi's version reads, "is not called: what is sought can be obtained." Wang Bi's and Heshang Gong's versions mistakenly read it as "going by what is sought to obtain." Fu Yi's version is accurate here.

Chapter 75: Fu Yi's version reads: "The people take death lightly, because their superiors go after richness in life." Wang Bi's and Heshang's versions are both missing the word "superiors," which should be added according to the Fu Yi version.

Chapter 76: Fu Yi's version reads, "human life is soft and weak, human death is stiff and firm. Grasses and trees alive are soft and crisp." Wang Bi's and Heshang Gong's versions superfluously add "all things" after "grasses and trees". Fu Yi's version should be followed here.

The abovementioned points are the greatest contributions of the Fu Yi version—many mistakes in ancient editions can be corrected on the basis of this version.

Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (*d. 669*), Daodejing kaiti xujue yishu 道德经开题序诀义疏 [A Hermeneutic Study of the Subject Revealing and the Knack Ordering of the Daodejing]

Cheng Xuanying mixes up foundational ideas in Laozi's philosophy. For example, his explanation of the Dao is:

> … before the original *qi* and great emptiness, still and solitary as such what could be there! The utmost essence moves and arouses, and the genuine oneness is generated. Genuine oneness moves spirit (神), and original *qi* transforms itself; original *qi* is *you* 有 [presence, having, being] in *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] in *you* 有 [presence, having, being], vastness that cannot be measured, subtleness that cannot be discerned. Gradually becoming lit-up, while dimly obscure without a thread, the sprout of all forms, shapes begin from this. Thereafter, the clear, smooth, and transparent *qi* goes up and becomes the sky/heaven (天), while the turbid, stagnant, and non-transparent *qi* congeals and becomes the earth (地) … that which generated the forms of the heavens, earth, humans, and things, original *qi* that is; granting the spirit (灵) to the heavens, earth, humans, and things, spirit (神) clarity that is … If the Dao is complete, then the spirit rules; if the spirit rules, then the *qi* is efficacious (灵); if the *qi* is efficacious, then the form supreme; if the form is supreme, then the nature is penetrating. One with a penetrating nature, continually mediates, and becomes one with the Dao, and can make *you* 有 [presence, having, being] into *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being], and can make emptiness (虚) into substance (实). I am a companion with the creator of all things—how can life and death burden me?

As we can easily see in this paragraph, Cheng Xuanying has not only incorporated terminology from the Buddhist and Daoist religions, but he has also mixed up Laozi's thought.

Cheng's two most distinctive characteristics [in his analysis and commentary] can also be called his two greatest weaknesses [mistakes].

1) The *Zhuangzi* [*Writings of Master Zhuang*] is used to justify certain readings of the *Laozi*. The basic mentality and artistic conception [i.e. writing style] of Laozi and Zhuangzi are very different. Zhuangzi had many concepts that Laozi did not. For example, the last two lines of the paragraph above read, "I am a companion with the creator of all things—how can life and death burden me?". This type of Zhuangzian thought—"coming and going with the spirit (神) essence of the heavens and earth" as well as "life and death being one"—is not found in Laozi. Moreover, in his annotation of the line "when twisted it is whole" from Chapter 22, Cheng writes, "like Zhuangzi says: 'I zigzag while walking, and [thus] my feet are unharmed.'" This sentence ["when twisted it is whole"] points to forgetting about violating straightness. "Forgetting (忘)" is in Zhuangzi's realm and using it to explain Laozi is unfitting. Additionally, to [the line] "by bending crooked it is made straight" [also from Chapter 22] Cheng annotates: "This sentence refers to forgetting about reputation." This is using the *Zhuangzi* to enshroud the *Laozi*. Moreover, using "forgetting about reputation" to explain "by

bending crooked it is made straight" is obviously a mistake. There are many instances in which Cheng uses the *Zhuangzi* to explain the *Laozi*, of which I have only shown a few.

2) Concepts from Buddhism and religious Daoism are used to explain the *Laozi*. For example, Chapter 25 records: "*Shi* 逝 [to pass] means *yuan* 远 [distant, far]". Cheng writes: "Transcend the three spheres [Buddhist *trailokya survase*], travel afar to [the place of] the three pure ones [the Daoist trinity]." And to "*yuan* 远 [distant, far] means *fan* 反 [reversal, to return]" [also from Chapter 25] Cheng annotates: "Having achieved the Dao by himself, and [arrived at] the divine realm of the complete and remote, therefore, [he is] able to return to the earthly domain, benevolently saving the multitude and enlightening the age of confusion. Regarding [the place of] the three pure ones as the three realms, and realizing the three realms are [the place of] the three pure ones, therefore, [he] returns to the earthly world, [only to find it] is exactly the great all-inclusive heaven (*da luo tian* 大罗天 [Daoist term for the highest realm])." This type of explanation makes the *Laozi* completely unrecognizable. In Cheng's annotations, there are many instances where the *Laozi* is misread through Buddhist and Daoist religious notions.

However, Cheng Xuanying's annotation to the *Zhuangzi* remains a first-class work, which far exceeds his annotation and explanation of the *Laozi*.

Wang Zhen 王真 (*Late Tang; ca. 9th Century*), Daodejing lunbing yaoyi shu 道德经论兵要义述 [Outline of Discussions of Military Affairs in the Daodejing]

This book uses the *Daodejing* to "discuss military affairs," but it does not promote the use of the military, or instruct on how to use the military. On the contrary, it actually promotes not using the military, and not contending or fighting. The author has a firm grasp on Laozi's notion of not contending, and expands on it. The entire book is full of rich anti-war arguments and ideas. Perhaps the most surprising part is that the author was a general who had great military power at his disposal. He was an important general for Emperor Xianzong of Tang 唐宪宗 (d. 820).

The target reader of the book is Emperor Xianzong of Tang himself (every paragraph begins with "Your subject Zhen narrates:"). Wang Zhen felt deeply that war brought disaster and calamity to the people, and thereby argued forcefully about the disastrous consequences of war: "Contending for a city, [leads to] the killing of [the amount of] people that populate an entire city. Contending for a land, [leads to] the killing of [the amount of] people that populate an entire land" (Chapter 8). Wang adds: "Your subject ventures to borrow the case of the Qin to demonstrate this. Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 BCE), Zhao Gao 趙高 (d. 207 BCE), Bai Qi 白起 (d. 257 BCE), Meng Tian 蒙恬 (d. 210 BCE), and their kind, did not assist their ruler by means of the Dao and

instead recklessly employed military forces and violence to invade, devour, seize, combat against [other states] … [in the end,] [the corpses of] Li Si and his son rotted at [the market place of] Yuyang, Bai Qi committed suicide with his own sword at Duyou, and Zhao Gao met his death at the palace—that was the retribution of resorting to arms and violence. Moreover, to employ an army of one hundred thousand [soldiers] will cost ten thousand golds per day. When there is an army of one hundred thousand [soldiers] deployed on the battlefield, consequently there would be a million of people, homeless, wondering in the streets and roads" (Chapter 30). Furthermore, "if [a ruler] wages war frequently, enforces tough laws and severe punishments, the people will have nothing to rely on [namely, they will be in extreme poverty]" (Chapter 74).

If rulers were to stop wars and causing military revolts, only then would society be peaceful and calm, and the people would be settled, secure, and unconcerned. Wang writes: "If the rulers do not blame the people, then naturally [harsh] punishments will not be employed. If [harsh] punishments are not employed, then the people will naturally not rise up in military revolt. If the people do not rise up in military revolt, then the entire world will naturally be without [troublesome] affairs (无事) [and everyone will be at peace]" (Chapter 5). "The person(s) who orders the state and the world should value settledness, unanxiousness, tranquility, and not hindering [the people] as the root.… With enlightened rulers, people will not rise up in military revolt" (Chapter 60). Wang Zhen thinks that the most useful part of the philosophy established by Laozi is "convincing rulers at the top to practice non-action, and have the people not contend." This is the real motivation behind Wang Zhen's own exegesis. He also writes: "I once carefully studied this 5,000 word text. Each time I investigated its profound meaning and pondered its main underlying points, I could not but come to regard firstly the idea of non-action and secondly the idea of not contending as the seminal teaching [of the *Daodejing*]." Wang Zhen understood Laozi's core concepts of "non-action" and "not contending" very deeply and put a lot of effort into elucidating them. He elaborates on "non-action" as follows:

"The art of non-action is to carry out its function secretly and grant its virtue in a hidden manner, allowing the people to make use of it daily without knowing it.… The ruler is non-active in terms of pleasure and anger, thereby rewards and punishments are not overabundant and revolts do not occur; non-active in terms of seeking, thereby taxes are not heavy, and sacrifices are not overly luxurious" (Chapter 2).

"Those who practice non-action, warn their rulers not to engage in military and war affairs. The *Lunyu* 论语 [*Analects of Confucius*] records: 'What did Shun do? He only sat reverently on the throne facing south (15.5)" (Chapter 3).

"So-called non-action is simply not engaging in military and war affairs. Military and war affairs harm deeply. If one [a ruler] wishes to care for the people, [one should] first get rid of harm" (Chapter 10).

The opposite of "non-action" is "conscious assertive action (有为)" and "having affairs, matters (有事)." Wang Zhen writes: "Those who have affairs, levy heavy taxes to obtain the people's goods; those who practice conscious assertive action use weapons to harm people's lives."

"Non-action" includes "not contending." Wang Zhen spares no effort in explaining the root and the harm of contending and conflict. Emphasizing the importance of "not contending", he writes:

The fierce and arrogant must contend, the resentful and extreme must contend, the luxuriant and extravagant must contend, the conceited and boastful must contend, the successful and value[-obsessed] must contend, the arbitrary and unrestrained must content. If the ruler has one of these, then wars will be waged within the [four] seas; if feudal princes have one of these, then armies will meet in battle in their feuds.... Therefore, the ruler who knows the way of making the people settled and unanxious, must first cast off their own sicknesses, and cause them to be without contending; and then armies will be at rest. When armies can rest, then warfare ceases, which is why the most important thing is to not contend.

"Contending is the source of war and the root of disorder and calamity. Thus this classic [i.e. the *Laozi*] repeats throughout that the most important thing is to not contend."

In his *Daodejing lunbing yaoyi shu* 道德经论兵要义述 [*Outline of Discussions of Military Affairs in the Daodejing*], Wang Zhen removes all metaphysical meaning from the *Laozi*. For instance, in Chapter 4 we read: "The Dao is empty, but use it and it might never fill," which clearly describes "the Dao's" body (体). Wang Zhen, however, gives the chapter practical significance, arguing that "[it] discusses the ruler experiencing (体) the Dao, using his heart-mind without full intentions, and constantly maintaining it deeply clear and tranquil." Chapter 8 serves as another good example. The chapter reads: "The highest good is to be like water" and Wang Zhen explains that "this passage has a special focus on essential ideas about managing military affairs. The best armies are like water. When water is overabundant, there are floods and inundation; when armies are in disorder, the people will be plunged into an abyss of misery." Although this type of explanation is not necessarily related to the original meaning of the *Laozi*, it does coincide with the text on a fundamental idea, namely, that even when yielding authority and power, one cannot allow disasters or calamities to plunge the people into an abyss of misery.

At the end of the book Wang Zhen attached a letter to the emperor. The emperor read it and gave a very concise response: "While reading, [I could not] stop sighing. The autumn is getting cooler, my dear subject, [I wish you are] safe and sound." These few lines do not only express his resonance with the text, but also reveal feelings of affection. When Wang Zhen received the emperor's letter, he had more to write in response, again referring to the harmfulness of warfare: "... make the ten thousand families die

the cruelest death[46] in order to give vent to one person's spite, [causing] the great sorrow transmit within [the four] seas and the calamities spread under heaven …" These vehement words evidence Wang Zhen's admirable moral courage and concern for the people, and one feels a strong spirit of humanism shining through them.

Lu Xisheng 陆希声 (*d. 895 or 901*), Daode zhenjing chuan 道德真经传 [On the Genuine Daodejing]

As Lu Xisheng writes, "the art/method of Laozi is rooted in the basic disposition (质); from the basic disposition (质) one recovers one's nature (*xing* 性)." Lu regards "transforming the feelings (情), recovering the nature (性), and "rectifying the feelings (情) by means of the nature (性)" as the basic premise of Laozi's philosophy.

In the preface, he writes: "… The world then became extremely disordered … thereafter, Confucius explicated refinement (文) from the five generations,[47] in order to save [the world from] degeneracy. Laozi [nevertheless] relied on the basic disposition (质) of the Three Sovereigns (三皇), so as to rescue it [the world] from disorder. Their criterion was the same." In his commentary on Chapter 18, Lu Xisheng remarks that "the arts/methods of Confucius and Laozi are not in conflict with one another." Moreover, the commentary on Chapter 19 reads: "How could the art/method of Laozi not conform to that of Confucius?!" Both Confucius and Laozi have the same goal of saving the world in mind—this would be a valid point. However, we cannot equate their attitudes towards life or their value orientations simply because they have the same intention of "rescuing [the world from] disorder." Lu Xisheng has failed to make a clear distinction here. Although he interprets Laozi in terms of Confucianism, the trace of Confucianism is not obvious. Still, his explanations on the main points of each chapter are clear and recommendable.

Other Commentators

Lu Deming (*d. 630*), Laozi yinyi 老子音义 [Phonological and Semantic Commentary of the Laozi]

A phonological work on Wang Bi's text of the *Laozi*.

46 Tr. note: Here Wang Zhen used a variation of a Chinese idiom (成语) "肝脑涂地" which literally means the liver and brain paint the ground. It is used to describe the cruelest death, like being smashed on the ground.

47 "Five generations" here refers to the reigns of the legendary Five Emperors (五帝).

Wei Zheng 魏征 (*d. 643*), Laozi zhi yao 老子治要 [Extracts from the Laozi][48]

It contains excerpts from Heshang Gong's commentary, but the alchemical terms related to breathing practices and extending life, have been deleted.

Yan Shigu 颜师古 (*d. 645*), Xuanyan xinji ming lao bu 玄言新记明老部 [New Remarks on the Dark Words for Clarifying Lao[zi]'s Text]

This is a concise explanation of the major point(s) in every chapter of the *Laozi* (those after Chapter 57 are missing)—the explanation for each chapter is only one or two lines. Yan does not have a particularly unique view of Laozi's thinking, nevertheless, "his commentary on 'fine (佳) weapons' in Chapter 31 proves that Wang Bi had a seven-word commentary on this chapter which [is not extant but] was still attached to the text in the Tang dynasty. [Moreover,] this can provide evidences for justifying the hermeneutic accounts [of this chapter] by the scholars in the Song dynasty. [Therefore, judging by this case, Yan Shigu's book] is quite significant with respect to textual studies [of the *Laozi*]." (Quoted from Yan Lingfeng's analysis.)

Li Rong 李荣 (*d. 683*), Daode zhenjing zhu 道德真经注 [Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing]

This commentary is not extant. Yan Lingfeng recovered the current version on the basis of the incomplete text included in the *Dao zang* 道藏 [*Daoist Canon*] and quotes by Li Rong incorporated into Qiang Siqi's 强思齐 (10th century; dates unknown) *Daode zhenjing xuande zuanshu* 道德真经玄德纂疏 [*Collected Commentaries on the Dark Virtue of the Genuine Daodejing*].

Li Rong was a Daoist practitioner during the reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang 唐高宗 (d. 683), and thus his commentary on the *Laozi* has a strong religious Daoist flavor.

Ma Zong 马总 (*d. 823*), Laozi yilin 老子意林 [An Extract of the Laozi]

This is a commentary to specific passages and words from the *Laozi* and it is rather clear.

48 This is one chapter from the great book compiled by Wei Zheng et al., namely, *Qun shu zhiyao* 群书治要. Here "治要" means "extract", and "extracts" in this title indicates extracts from multiple books.

Gu Huan 顾欢 (*d. 485*), Daodejing zhushu 道德经注疏 [Commentary and Annotation of the Daodejing]

This work incorporates Heshang Gong's annotation and Cheng Xuanying's commentary. It also refers to another fifteen sources of annotation and commentary, such as the one by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang.

Qiao Feng 乔讽 (*date unknown*), Daodejing shuyi jiejie 道德经疏义节解 [Sectional Explanation of a Hermeneutic Study of the Daodejing]

[This work] explains the *Laozi* through a mixture of references to historical events and various other accounts.

3 From the Two Song Dynasties to the Yuan Dynasty

Wang Anshi 王安石 (*d. 1086*), Laozi zhu 老子注 [Commentary to the Laozi][49]

This book comprises two volumes which are not extant. Fragments of Wang's commentaries can be gathered from quotes used in Peng Si's 彭耜 (d. 1229) *Daode zhenjing ji zhu* 道德真经集注 [*Collected Commentaries on the Genuine Daodejing*]. In his book, for the first time, Wang Anshi reads *wu* 无 [non-presence, lacking, non-being] and *you* 有 [presence, having, being] as the subjects of statements. All his predecessors had taken *wuming* 无名 [without name, nameless], *youming* 有名 [having name], *wuyu* 无欲 [without desire], and *youyu* 有欲 [with desire] as subjects.

There is an appendix entitled *Laozi* (cited from *Linchuan xiansheng wenji* 临川先生文集 [*Anthology of Master Linchuan*] vol 68), which is made up of only five hundred words. The end of this short essay reads: "If one abolishes the spokes and naves of the wagon, and abolishes rituals, music, laws and regulations in the world, waiting for the function of *wu* 无 (non-presence) in these [situations], then this is also close to stupidity."

Other Commentators

Song Luan 宋鸾 (*ca. 10th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daode pianzhang xuansong 道德篇章玄颂 [The Mysterious Chanting for the Chapters of the Daodejing]

This work uses poems in the seven-syllable form to extol the ideas in the *Laozi*.

49 Tr. note: Referred to in the text as *Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben* 王安石老子注辑本 [*Wang Anshi's Commentary to the Laozi*].

Su Zhe 苏辙 (*d. 1112*), Laozi jie 老子解 [Explanations of the Laozi]

The views expressed in this exegesis of the *Laozi* are quite insightful. The work has been considered important by scholars since the Song and Ming dynasties. One of its characteristics is that it repeatedly emphasizes the notion of "*fu xing* 复性 (Recovering [Human] Nature)".

Cheng Ju 程俱 (*d. 1144*), Laozi lun 老子论 [On the Laozi]

This work consists of five short essays: essay one is on the Dao; essay two explains that the study of the *Laozi* does not support richly nourishing life and also has nothing to do with [seeking] longevity; essay three expounds on transcendence beyond the antithesis of life and death; essay four is an interpretation of Chapter 10 of the *Laozi*; essay five focuses on Laozi's intention, namely, "salvation of the world and expiation of the multitude".

Ye Mengde 叶梦得 (*d. 1148*), Laozi jie 老子解 [Explanations of the Laozi]

"Words or speech" in the *Laozi* not only carries a literal meaning—it also has the connotation of decrees and policies. Ye's interpretation of Chapter 17 is as follows: "Decrees and precepts are nothing but 'words or speech'." While short in length, this book expresses innovative ideas.

Cheng Dachang 程大昌 (*d. 1195*), Yi lao tongyan 易老通言 [A Comprehensive Discourse of the Book of Changes and the Laozi]

Cheng holds that "the arguments of the book of Laozi can hardly establish a new approach that is distinct from the 'Commentary on the Appended Phrases'". Moreover, [he argues that] all of Laozi's sayings trace back to the *Book of Changes*, but the terminology is amended so that the source is concealed and the work appears as introducing a brand new school of thought." Such a view denies any creativity to the philosophy of Laozi, and at the same time overlooks the intention and historical significance of the text.

Yuan Xingzong 员兴宗 (*d. 1170*), Laozi lüejie 老子略解 [A Brief Explanation of the Laozi]

This work extracts passages from the *Laozi* and comments on them through the use of quotes by Confucius and Mencius. Occasionally, it also uses quotes from Zhuangzi. However, most of the commentary is incongruent with the original meaning of the *Laozi*. (Kou Caizhi 寇才质 (12th century; dates unknown) *Daode zhenjing sizi gudao jijie* 道德真经四子古道集解 [*Genuine Daodejing and the Collective Commentaries of the Four Masters' antique Dao*].)

In its commentaries, this book cites the works of the four Daoist masters (i.e. the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], the *Wenzi* 文子 [*Writings of Master Wen*], the *Liezi* 列子 [*Writings of Master Lie*], and the *Gengsangzi* 耕桑子 [*Writings of Master Gengsang*]).[50] Great effort was put on extraction, and [the different inputs are] good for comparative study and mutual interpretation.

Lü Zuqian 吕祖谦 (*d. 1181*), Yinzhu Laozi Daodejing 音注老子道德经 [Phonetic Commentary of the Laozi's Daodejing]

Based on Heshang Gong's version, this book attaches the pronunciation of words at the end of each commentary.

Ge Changgeng 葛长庚 (*b. 1194*), Daode baozhang 道德宝章 [The Precious Chapters of Dao and De]

This book's commentaries on the *Laozi* are intermingled with Buddhist views.

Zhao Bingwen 赵秉文 (*d. 1232*), Daode zhenjing jijie 道德真经集解 [Collected Interpretations of the Genuine Daodejing]

This work includes the whole text of Su Zhe's *Laozi jie* 老子解 [*Explanations of the Laozi*], and at the same time it cites the commentaries of the Zheng He period version,[51] Kumārajīva, Lu Shisheng, and Sima Guang 司马光 (d. 1086). Occasionally, it records the author's own opinions.

Dong Sijing 董思靖 (*13th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daode zhenjing jijie 道德真经集解 [Collected Interpretations of the Genuine Daodejing]

This book contains rather innovative interpretations of the *Laozi*, among which that of Chapter 36 is the most cogent (quoted above). At the end of each chapter, there is a brief summary, offering a concise presentation of the subject matter of the chapter. In addition, this work also quotes Sima Guang, Su Zhe, et al. Dong's *Collected Interpretations* surpass Zhao Bingwen's homonymous work.

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50 Tr. note: Chen used other names of the books here; *Scripts of Southern Florescence* (the *Zhuangzi*), *Scripts of Communicating the Darkness* (the *Wenzi*), *Scripts of the Empty and Void* (i.e., the *Liezi*), and *Scripts of the Deep and Nimble* (the *Gengsangzi*).

51 Tr. note: It refers to the version compiled by Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty.

Li Jiamou 李嘉谋 (*d. 1258*), Daode zhenjing yijie 道德真经义解 [Interpretation of the Genuine Daodejing]

The commentaries in this work follow the sequence of the chapters of the original text and are relatively coherent. The so-called "Xi Zhai Commentary," quoted in Jiao Hong's 焦竑 (d. 1620)

Laozi yi 老子翼 [*The Wing of the Laozi*], is actually from this book, as "Xi Zhai" is Li Jiamou's Daoist name.

Lin Xiyi, Laozi yanzhai kouyi 老子鬳斋口义 [Interpretation of the Laozi in Everyday Language by Yanzhai]

Plain words are used for interpretation, [making this work] clear and easy to comprehend. However, Lin's *Zhuangzi kouyi* 庄子口义 [*Interpretation of the Zhuangzi in Everyday Language*] is much more recommendable.

Gong Shixie[52] 龚士卨 (*ca. 1260; Dates Unknown*), Zuantu huzhu Laozi Daodejing 纂图互注老子道德经 [Compiled Illustrations and Mutual Interpretations of the Laozi's Daodejing]

This work follows Heshang Gong's version. At the end of a sentence "mutual interpretation" is usually attached, and there are often quotes from the *Zhuangzi* for a complementary explanation. At the beginning of the book there is the graph "Laozi's Design of the Chariot" (老子车制图).

Fan Yingyuan 范应元 (*13th Century; Dates Unknown*), Laozi Daodejing guben jizhu 老子道德经古本集注 [Collected Commentary to the Ancient Laozi Text]

This collection has several distinct characteristics. Firstly, its explanations are precise and succinct. Secondly, it refers to multiple ancient texts and phonetic studies, verifying the passages from the various ancient editions which are identical to the original text. Thirdly, it carefully selects commentaries from thirty commentators, such as Wang Bi, Heshang Gong, Lu Deming, Fu Yi, Sima Guang, Su Zhe, et al. This work is valuable as a reference book and is considered greatly important by scholars of textual studies.

52 Tr. note: 卨; we cannot find the pinyin for this character.

***Liu Chenweng* 刘辰翁 (*d. 1297*), Laozi Daodejing pingdian 老子道德经评点 [Punctuated and Annotated Edition of Laozi's Daodejing]**

Interpretation and criticism on the basis of Lin Xiyi's *Kouyi* 口义 [*Interpretation of the Laozi in Everyday Language*].

***Zhang Sicheng* 张嗣成 (*d. 1344*), Daode zhenjing zhangju xunsong 道德真经章句训颂 [Instructive Chanting for the Chapters of the Daodejing]**

Using the five-syllable or seven-syllable form to make sentences, this work extols the meaning/ideas of the *Laozi* following the sequence of its chapter arrangement.

***Chen Guanwu* 陈观吾 (*14th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daodejing zhuanyu 道德经转语 [The Converted Language of the Daodejing]**

This work follows the chapter arrangement of Heshang Gong's edition, but converts each chapter into a seven-syllable *jueju* 绝句 [Chinese quatrain]. Occasionally mixed with Buddhist ideas, this chanting piece falls into the same category with Song Luan's *Daode pianzhang xuansong* 道德篇章玄颂 [*The Mysterious Chanting for the Chapters of the Daodejing*] and Zhang Sicheng's *Daode zhenjing zhangju xunsong* 道德真经章句训颂 [*Instructive Chanting for the Chapters of the Daodejing*]. It comes with notes on pronunciation and is worth referring to.

***Wu Cheng* 吴澄 (*d. 1333*), Daode zhenjing zhu 道德真经注 [Commentary on the Genuine Daodejing]**

With an accurate and clear commentary, this excellent work is a must-read for anyone who studies the *Laozi*.

***He Daoquan* 何道全 (*d. 1399*), Taishang laozi daodejing 太上老子道德经 [The Grand Supreme Laozi's Daodejing]**

On the basis of Heshang Gong's version, this work collects commentaries from Heshang Gong, Lin Xiyi, Xiao Yingsou, Li Qing-an, Ruyuzi, et al. At the end of each chapter, there is a summary, attached to which there are the four-syllable, five-syllable, or seven-syllable lines. "Although [its commentaries] blend in the ideas of Daoist priests, it can be acceptable occasionally." (The quote is by Yan Lingfeng)

***Jiang Rongan* 蒋融庵 (*d. 1367*), Laode zhenjing song 老德真经颂 [Chanting for the Genuine Canon from the Old Virtuous]**

This work follows the total number of chapters of the *Laozi* and comprises eighty-one seven-syllable *jueju* 绝句 [Chinese quatrain]. It belongs to the same category with the works of Song Luan, Zhang Sicheng, etc.

4 Ming Dynasty

Xue Hui 薛蕙 (*d. 1541*), Laozi jijie 老子集解 [Collected Interpretations of the Laozi]

In his early years, Xue Hui enjoyed reading books on the art of becoming an immortal and attaining longevity. Only when he later began researching the *Laozi* did he discover that his previous studies had merely been on the "minor art of alchemy". In the preface of this work, Xue writes: "In my early years, I was fond of reading books on immortality and longevity and consulted every possible work of masters in this field. When I later read the *Laozi*, I realized that the books I had previously enjoyed so much merely focused on the minor art of alchemy, which is something different from the study of nature and life. [...] People of later generations had come to assume that Daoism is simply concerned with nourishing life, which is something I do not understand. I also found it strange that when alchemist masters spoke of nourishing life, their forced interpretations deviated considerably from nature and life." It is worth mentioning here that Xue managed to avoid his predecessors' tendency to write commentaries on the *Laozi* using the bizarre vocabulary of religious Daoism.

The *Collected Commentaries* follow the order of the chapters laid out in the Wang Bi version. Although the notes and commentaries themselves are not as incisive as those in the Wu Cheng edition, there are still a lot of original insights to be found (the comments on chapter 29 are far superior to those of other interpreters, as the reader can tell from the quotes provided in the commentary section of the current work). The most distinctive trait of the *Collected Commentaries* is that it often provides evaluations and clarifications of previous misinterpretations at the end of a chapter. A few examples:

> Chapter 36 is one of the most often misinterpreted of the whole book and is generally misunderstood as implicitly supporting the practice of strategic deception. Taking the Cheng brothers as an example, Xue offers us the following evaluation: "Master Cheng [Master Yichuan (伊川先生), Cheng Yi 程頤 (d. 1107)] often argued as follows: 'When the words in the *Laozi* are incoherent, they can be as opposite as ice and fire. Its original intention was to discuss the most abstruse and subtle aspects of the Dao, but later it came to be marked as focusing on strategic deception, as we see in phrases such as "if [one] wants to *qu* 取 [take, gain] it, [one] must first *yu* 与 [give, provide] it." Although the words of Master Cheng Yi [...] are those of a great scholar, we should not always assume they are accurate. In my opinion, this chapter first of all clarifies that what initially flourishes will come to decay, and then describes how it is better to yield than to remain indomitable. Finally, it accordingly warns people not to employ the

> firm and indomitable. How could all of these be the art of strategic deception? Seeing that Laozi finds fault with humaneness, appropriateness, sageliness, and wisdom, how could we possibly suspect him of deception? According to the *Shiji* 史记 [*Records of the Grand Historian*], [the chancellor] Chen Ping 陈平 (d. 178 BCE) had originally practiced the arts of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi. After he had gained his official title, he often said: 'I have been involved in many secret plots, which is prohibited by the followers of the Dao. If my descendants were to come to ruins, that would be the end of it. Never again would they be able to rise up, all because of the misfortune my schemes have brought about.' Taking this statement into account, we can see how claiming that Laozi propagated a teaching of deception goes against what the text explicitly prohibits, while going so far as to turn this prohibition into a written text meant to instruct people. This cannot possibly be the case."

At the end of chapter 38, Xue Hui clarifies the difference between Laozi and the learning of the Jin period: "After the Taikang era [of Emperor Wu of Jin 晋武帝 (d. 289)] and until the fall of Eastern Jin dynasty, most scholars strove for fame and indulged in idleness, craved for privileges and lusted after bodily pleasures. Laozi tells us: 'The most white seems *ru* 辱 [shame, dishonor, smeared, dirty]' [Chapter 41]. How is this striving for fame? The Laozi also says: 'One who *qiang* 强 [force, strong, violent] *xing* 行 [do, walk] (2) has [lasting] will' [Chapter 33]. What does this have to do with indulging in idleness? It speaks of 'being less concerned with yourself and minimizing your desires' [Chapter 19]. How is that craving for privileges? Not displaying desirable [objects] [Chapter 3]. So far from lusting after bodily pleasures! 'As if they fear their neighbors in all four directions' [Chapter 15]. Does this show a predilection for wanton behavior? *Duo* 多 [much, many, numerous] *yan* 言 [speech, to speak] *shu* 数 [to count, number] failure [Chapter 5]. Does that count as 'pure talk' (清谈)? If we take all of this into account, we see that the difference between the actions of people from the Jin period and the words of Laozi could not possibly be greater."

Moreover, in the concluding remarks to Chapter 54, Xue criticizes Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (d. 1200) idea that "Laozi's thought was actually the same as Yang Zhu's 杨朱 [d. 360 BCE]". In the conclusion to Chapter 58, he clarifies the differences between the legalism of Shen Buhai 申不害 (d. 337 BCE) and Han Feizi on the one hand, and the teachings of Laozi on the other, while criticizing Sima Qian 司马迁 (d. 86 BCE) for having blurred the distinction between the two (Sima Qian saw Shen Buhai, Han Feizi, and Laozi as having originated from the same [notion of] the Dao and virtuosity, thus giving rise to many subsequent misinterpretations). These criticisms and insights are all very much to the point. In earlier commentaries, one rarely encounters such critical language and lucid interventions. Although Xue Hui's *Collected Commentaries* has not been very influential, it is still very much worth reading.

Wang Dao 王道 (*d. 1547*), Laozi yi 老子亿 [Conjecture about the Laozi]

Wang's courtesy name was Chunfu. This work provides a chapter-by-chapter commentary of the text, frequently availing itself of originally Confucian ideas, and may be regarded as fluent and lucid. In the preface, Wang expresses his disagreement with those dividing the text into a "book on *dao*" and a "book on *de*": "When Emperor Xuanzong of Tang rearranged the chapters of the *Laozi*, the book was for the first time divided into two parts on the basis of the meaning of the first characters of these parts, the first discussing *dao* and being called 'classic of *dao*' and the second discussing *de* and being called 'classic of *de*'; this led to an incoherent fragmentation which misses the basic intention of this book." There are two noteworthy points in the commentary itself. The first concerns the phrase "Care for your body like cherishing a disaster" from Chapter 13. While all other commentators provide a literal interpretation of this phrase, Wang Chunfu is the only one to point out: "The order of the words in this sentence should be 貴身若大患 instead of 貴大患若身. This reversed order of the characters is a curiosity in the literature. [However,] there are indeed several such examples in the ancient language." When we look at the original meaning of the text of the *Laozi*, we realize that Wang's interpretation is correct. The second point is that a number of annotations to chapter 31 have crept into the main text and went unnoticed for such a long time that it became impossible to distinguish the original text from the annotations (in the Wang Bi version, this chapter has no annotations.) Wang Chunfu was the first to raise doubts concerning this issue, pointing out that "some of the ancient commentaries crept into the text of the scripture itself here."

Shen Yiguan 沈一贯 (*d. 1617*), Laozi tong 老子通 [Comprehensive Commentary on the Laozi]

This work offers a very clear analysis. Its first part is a text entitled *Laozi gaibian* 老子概辨 [*General Disputation on the Laozi*], where it is claimed that "those who revere Laozi indulge in excessive adulation; those who make light of Laozi are unsparing in their criticism." The text points to various criticisms of the *Laozi* and proceeds to refute them, devoting particular attention to the misinterpretations of Master Cheng [Cheng Yi] and Master Zhu [Zhu Xi]. Cheng Yi's grossest misunderstanding concerns the issue of strategic deception: "When Laozi speaks of 'giving away' and 'gathering in,' the intended meaning is 'taking hold of' and 'unfolding' respectively (Chapter 36), which refer to the art of strategic deception." In reality, however, this passage from Chapter 36 is simply meant to explain the principle according to which opposites give rise to each other, and has nothing to do with political deception. Zhu Xi on his part mistakenly believes that Laozi "disproves of vigorously exerting oneself and only allows for action after one has attained a comfortable position. He shrinks from action [when one is] in the slightest inconvenience." Zhu offers a very superficial interpretation, taking Laozi'

proposed attitude to be "limited to that of a privileged position". In this particular work, Shen Yiguan also criticizes Zhu Xi's interpretation of Laozi's notion of "non-presence (无)" and holds that "Zhu Xi misses the point". Shen adds: "In naming the Dao, Laozi speaks simultaneously of 'presence' and 'non-presence'. How could he possibly discuss the Dao with reference to 'non-presence' alone?" Shen is absolutely correct in taking both "presence" and "non-presence" as referring to the Dao.

Gui Youguang 归有光 (*d. 1571*), Daodejing pingdian 道德经评点 [Punctuated and Annotated Edition of the Daodejing]

Based on the annotated Heshang Gong edition, this work includes comments by various Song-Ming scholars at the top margin of the page. It also includes a preface by Emperor Taizu of Song 宋太祖 (d. 960) which reveals his personal insights in reading the *Laozi*. Emperor Taizu reportedly exclaimed at one point: "I have read in this book that '[if] the people do not fear death, why and how can death be taken to [make] them afraid?' (Chapter 74). In the current age, the world has just begun to be stabilized. The people are obstinate and the officials fraudulent. Even if ten are publicly executed in the morning, there will be one hundred engaging in the same actions by the time the sun sets. If things are like this, are they not exactly what is described in the *Laozi*? I thus abolished the death penalty, replacing it with imprisonment and penal servitude, and in less than a year, my anxieties had decreased." Here we can see some of the positive influence exerted by Laozi's ideas. In addition to the books preface, we find another preface written by Qin Jizong 秦继宗 (d. 1635), which describes how rulers such as Emperor Jing of Han 汉景帝 (d. 141 BCE) and Emperor Taizong of Tang were influenced by the *Laozi*, while it also discusses the Song Confucians' misinterpretations of the text.

Hong Yingshao 洪应绍 (*ca. Early 17th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daodejing ce 道德经测 [Observations on the Daodejing]

This work offers a Confucian reading of the *Laozi* and attempts to establish connections between the latter and the *Book of Changes*. To give a few examples, in Hong's view, "the phrase 'there is a thing that was formed muddled and mixed' (Chapter 25) in itself clearly supports the fundamental orientation of the *Book of Changes*. As for the phrase 'abandon learning and be without worry' (Chapter 20), it conveys the notion of 'not having learned it, it will always be advantageous'. The image of 'an infant that doesn't know how to laugh' (Chapter 20) expresses the primary conviction 'what is there to ponder or worry about'; 'empty but not *jue* 屈 [to use up, to exhaust]. [As it] moves, the more comes out' (Chapter 5); this refers to 'what remains still and unmoving, resonating with it and becoming connected'." As such, Hong argues that "the *Daodejing* qualifies as Laozi's version of the *Book of Changes*, or, alternatively, that the *Laozi* provides explanations to the divinatory diagrams and various sections

of the *Book of Changes*." While it is true that there are occasional resemblances between the *Laozi* and the *Book of Changes*, their respective philosophical bases and value orientation reveal marked differences. Traditional scholars did not heed the boundaries between various disciplines of study and thus often searched for "unity" while neglecting fundamental points of difference.

Other Commentators

Zhang Hongyang 张洪阳 (*Dates Unknown*), Daodejing zhujie 道德经注解 [Annotations and Commentary on the Laozi]

Approaches the *Laozi* as "a book concerned with nature and life."

Includes a concise interpretation of the concepts of *dao* 道 and *de* 德: "What is self-so is *dao*, attaining (*de* 得) *dao* is called *de* 德. Given rise to existence from non-existence, this is *dao*. Returning to non-existence from existence, this is *de*." The annotations are straightforward and very readable.

Shi Deqing 释德清 (*d. 1623*), Laozi daodejing jingjie 老子道德经解 [Explanations of Laozi's Daodejing]

Shi Deqing's pen name was Hanshan 憨山. His annotations to (the Inner Chapters) of the *Zhuangzi* are far better than those to the *Laozi*. Nonetheless, he makes incisive remarks in elaborating on its speculative principles. It remains a uniquely valuable work among the ancient commentaries.

Zhu Dezhi 朱得之 (*1485–?*), Laozi tongyi 老子通义 [General Meaning of the Laozi]

Zhu's book is divided into sixty-four chapters and offers a chapter-by-chapter commentary. It randomly invokes the annotations of Lin Xiyi, Wu Cheng, Xue Hui, Wang Chunfu 王纯甫 (d. 1547), and other scholars. This work is written in a verbose and superficial style. The only thing worth noting about the *General Meaning* is Zhu's remark that the character *qi* 泣 in the phrase "*bei'ai* 悲哀 [sorrowful, grieved] they are *qi* 泣 [to weep]" from Chapter 31 should be replaced with *li* 莅. According to Zhu, this phrase means "approaching [临] them with sorrow."

Lu Changgeng 陆长庚 (*d. 1631*), Laozi daodejing xuanlan 老子道德经玄览 [Profound Observations on the Daodejing of Laozi]

This work considers Laozi's thought as focusing on "fathoming the hidden aspects of nature and life." It offers a chapter-by-chapter commentary.

***Shen Jin* 沈津 (*16th Century; Dates Unknown*), Laozi daodejing leizuan 老子道德经类纂 [Concordance to the Daodejing of Laozi]**

This is a simple and highly readable commentary. Occasionally, it quotes the annotations of Wang Bi, Sima Guang, Su Zhe, and Dong Sijing to provide additional explanation.

***Wang Qiao* 王樵 (*d. 1601*), Laozi jie 老子解 [Explanations of the Laozi]**

This work offers an analysis of only ten chapters. It interprets the *Laozi* from a Confucian perspective and invokes the viewpoints of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi. Wang Qiao proposes a translation of the first chapter which reads the text in terms of the concepts of existence and non-existence: "The traditional annotations interpreting these lines as 'having name' (有名) and 'without name' (无名) seem to offer a reading unrelated to the meaning of the text. I am afraid that the reading 'without desires' (无欲) and 'having desires' (有欲) goes against the original intention of the text. One does not hear Laozi discuss about having and not having desires."

***Li Zhi* 李贽 (*d. 1602*), Laozi jie 老子解 [Explanations of the Laozi]**

This work contains some original insights.

***Zhang Dengyun* 张登云 (*d. 1639*), Laozi daodejing canbu 老子道德经参补 [Supplements to the Daodejing of Laozi]**

This work includes the Heshang Gong annotated edition and a small number of supplementary notes.

***Jiao Hong* 焦竑 (*d. 1620*), Laozi yi 老子翼 [The Wing of the Laozi]**

This is a selection of sixty-four commentaries compiled after the *Hanfeizi* 韩非子 [*Writings of Master Han Fei*], primarily including the annotations of Su Zhe, Lü Jifu 吕吉甫 [Lü Huiqing 吕惠卿] (d. 1111), Li Xizhai, Wang Chunfu, Li Zhi 李贽 (d. 1602), and others. It also contains an appendix entitled *Bisheng* 笔乘 [*The Brush-Chariot*] in which Jiao expresses his own views.

***Lin Zhao'en* 林兆恩 (*d. 1598*), Daodejing shilüe 道德经释略 [Brief Commentary on the Daodejing]**

It is a commentary consisting of interpretations by other scholars.

***Chen Shen* 陈深 (*Late 16th Century; Dates Unknown*), Laozi pinjie 老子品节 [Evaluation of the Laozi]**

This work consists of a copy of the annotated Heshang Gong edition with notes at the top of each page. In the first chapter, for example, we find the following comment: "Various scholars have focused their reading on 'lacking a name (无名)' and 'having

a name (有名),' or on 'having desires (有欲)' and 'not having desires (无欲)', and have interpreted '*jiao* 徼 [fringes, border]' as referring to '*qiao* 窍 [aperture or orifice].' How utterly mistaken!" His other comments in the top margin of the text are just as straightforward, but unfortunately lack profundity.

Xu Xuemo 徐学谟 (*d. 1593*), Laozi jie 老子解 [Explanations of the Laozi]

This work offers a chapter-by-chapter interpretation, with extensive critical comments on Su Zhe's, Xue Hui's, Lin Xiyi's, Li Xizhai's, and other scholars' notes. These critical comments are worth reading. Xu also mentions in passing the misinterpretations of Song-dynasty Confucians.

Wang Yiqing 王一清 (*Late 16th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daodejing shici 道德经释辞 [Explanation of Terms in the Daodejing]

In the book's preface, entitled *Daodejing zhiyi zonglun* 道德经旨意总论 [*General Introduction to the Aim of the Daodejing*], Wang points out that the five thousand-character text of the *Laozi* is not merely about ascetic practices to nurture life, but also about the way of governance, while he also gives an account of the influence of the text through the ages. His commentary invokes the opinions of a whole array of scholars.

Peng Haogu 彭好古 (*Late 16th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daodejing 道德经

Peng Haogu's work occasionally includes comments at the end of a phrase. "This collated edition has some value as a reference for commentators" (according to Yan Lingfeng).

Chen Yidian 陈懿典 (*d. 1638*), Daodejing jingjie 道德经精解 [Meticulous Interpretation of the Daodejing]

In this work, every sentence is accompanied by notes, which are highly readable. At the end of each chapter, as well as in the top margin, Chen Yidian cites comments by various scholars (such as Su Zhe, Li Xizhai, Li Hongfu, and Jiao Hong). It is worth consulting.

Zhong Xing 锺惺 (*d. 1625*), Laozi lang huan 老子鄮嬛 [Grand Library of the Laozi]

This work offers a chapter-by-chapter commentary, with comments at the top margin. Other than being concise, it has no other noteworthy feature.

Zhong Xing, Laozi wengui 老子文归 [Rearranged Text of the Laozi]

It consists of the original text of the Heshang Gong edition, to which punctuation is added. At the end of the first part, there is the following editorial remark: "Laozi's

Daodejing guides people in returning to their heavenly nature and is far from being an heterodox book."

Tao Wangling 陶望齡 (*d. 1609*), Tao Zhouwang jie Lao 陶周望解老 [Tao Zhouwang's Commentary on the Laozi]

Divided into two chapters, this work has no enumeration of chapters and only partial commentary. It contains misreadings, such as that of the phrase "heaven and earth are not humane (仁)" from Chapter 5, which Tao Wangling interprets as follows: "This passage is meant to provoke common sense, so later on the text talks about 'superfluous and harsh decrees' as self-criticism." Another example is the phrase "what enables all rivers and seas to be the *wang* 王 [king, supreme, to rule] of *bai gu* 百谷 [the hundred gullies]" from Chapter 66, on which Tao comments: "Many of Laozi's utterances are fanciful, probably to appeal to the vulgar world in its deafness." In these two cases, it is quite evident that we are dealing with misinterpretations.

Zhao Tong 赵统 (*ca. 1550; Dates Unknown*), Laozi duanzhu 老子断注 [Annotated Evaluation of the Laozi]

In his preface, the author argues that just like Confucius, Laozi confronted a world in decline and wished to save it. Moreover, Zhao rejects the "deviant ideas of alchemists" and "the misfortune brought by the alchemists". In his commentary, he claims that Laozi "had the intention to benefit the world" and further develops Laozi's notion of self-generation and self-transformation. In his commentary, he often uses Confucian concepts in a contrastive way.

Gong Xiumo 龚修默 (*16–17th Century; Dates Unknown*) Laozi huo wen 老子或问 [Questions on the Laozi]

At the beginning of this work, there is a summary of the main points raised in the chapters of the first part of the *Laozi*. It includes an appendix, entitled "Similarities between Laozi and Confucius," with a selection of similar-sounding passages from both thinkers. The commentary section is written in the question-answer format and provides a Confucian interpretation of the *Laozi*.

Pan Jiqing 潘基庆 (*Dates Unknown*), Daodejing jizhu 道德经集注 [Collected Annotations to the Laozi]

The book opens with an overview of appreciative and critical comments various masters and scholars made on the *Laozi*. The main text of each chapter is followed by a collation of textual variants and pronunciations. The section which consists of collected annotations draws from a variety of sources such as the *Liezi* 列子 [*Writings of Master Lie*], the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [*Writings of Master Zhuang*], the *Xunzi* 荀子 [*Writings of Master Xun*], the *Guanzi* 管子 [*Writings of Master Guan*], the *Guangchengzi* 广成子 [*Writings of Master Guangcheng*], the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [*Writings of Master Huainan*],

Su Zhe, and Li Zhi, as well as various scriptures from the religious Daoist tradition such as *Qingjing jing* 清静经 [*Book of Clarity and Tranquility*], *Yinfu jing* 阴符经 [*Book of the Hidden Tally*], and *Dingguan jing* 定观经 [*Book of Concentration and Contemplation*]. At the end of each chapter there are textual corrections which are a good reference.

Guo Lianghan 郭良翰 (*16–17th Century; Dates Unknown*), Laozi daodejing huijie 老子道德经薈解 [Collection of Commentaries on the Daodejing of Laozi]

In its preface, entitled *Daodejing huijie tici* 道德经荟解题辞 [*Outline of the Collection of Commentaries on the Daodejing*], this book clarifies some of the misinterpretations of Su Shi 苏轼 (d. 1101). According to Su Shi, "the teaching of Laozi emphasizes non-action and neglects the governance of the world and the state. Han Feizi received this teaching and then made light of the various learnings of the world, which resulted in immense cruelty and malice." After having introduced Laozi's basic concepts, Guo critically notes: "Being ignorant of the fact that Han Feizi availed himself of the dregs of the *Laozi*, Su also had only a superficial understanding of Han Feizi." Guo's *Collected Commentaries* follow the Heshang Gong edition and mostly rely on Lin Xiyi's *Laozi yanzhai kouyi* 老子鬳斋口义 [*Interpretation of the Laozi in Everyday Language by Yanzhai*]. At the end of each chapter, Guo invokes the commentaries of scholars such as Su Zhe, Lü Jifu, Li Xizhai, Wu Cheng, and Jiao Hong.

Chen Renxi 陈仁锡 (*d. 1636*), Laozi yishang 老子奇赏 [An Innovative Appreciation of the Laozi]

This is a punctuated copy of the Heshang Gong version.

Cheng Yining 程以宁 (*ca. Early 17th Century*), Taishang daode bao zhangyi 太上道德宝章翼 [Supplements to the Precious Chapters of the Supreme Daodejing]

This work offers an interpretation from a religious Daoist perspective. Cheng Yining argues that "trying to interpret the *Daodejing* from the perspective of the Confucian classics, the histories, and the various masters and schools of thought without having read books on alchemy and having received the secret instructions is like trying to observe the immortals from the perspective of ordinary human beings or trying to fathom the depths of the Buddha from the perspective of an ordinary person." This argument is completely misguided. Only the annotations to chapter 50 are worth consulting.

Yan Xichou 颜锡畴 (*15–16th Century; Dates Unknown*), Daodejing jie 道德经解 [Explication of the Daodejing]

This is a chapter-by-chapter commentary, clearly written and worth reading.

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